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# **THE ENDURING YOD**

## **AN EXAMINATION OF TORAH OBSERVANCE IN THE PROPHETIC MINISTRY AND TEACHING OF JESUS**

A Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Theology

by

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# Abstract

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The Enduring Yod

An Examination of Torah Observance in the Prophetic Mission and Teaching of Jesus

Master of Theology

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2016

This dissertation examines whether the Synoptic Jesus upheld the importance of Torah observance in his life and message, especially pertaining to his reputation as a miracle prophet. After surveying various viewpoints from prominent scholars, this study challenges broad trends that position Jesus in discontinuity with the Mosaic covenant and emphasize the Hellenization of Galilee. It begins with an analysis of Jesus' Jewish context, both his devout socio-religious setting and his conservative upbringing presented by Matthew and Luke. This study then highlights indicators of Torah praxis in Jesus' life and the significance of Jesus' role as a prophet, restoring Israel back to covenantal fidelity. It then examines Jesus' most explicit endorsement of the Hebrew Scriptures and the ethical injunctions of the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus is presented as one expounding and elucidating the will of God as revealed in the Law and Prophets. Using three major controversy stories recorded in Mark, this study determines whether Jesus abolishes or disregards Torah observance related to Sabbath, food and purity, and the Temple cult. The result is that the Synoptic Jesus does not abrogate or devalue such covenantal adherences, but emerges as a conservative and passionate advocate of obedience to every *yod*, or smallest letter, of Hebrew Holy Writ.

## **Acknowledgements**

Grateful acknowledgement is made to my wife, Kim, for all her support, sacrifice, and encouragement. I am also grateful to my parents for their faithful example and for the assistance of my supervisors, Dr. Jean-Marc Heimerdinger and Dr. Conrad Gempf.

## List of Abbreviations

CUP	Cambridge University Press
Beitz.	Beitzah
Ber.	Berakhot
Ker.	Keritot
Mek.	Mekhilta
Menah.	Menahot
OUP	Oxford University Press
Pesah.	Pesahim
Rab.	Rabbah
Sanh.	Sanhedrin
SBTS	Sources for Biblical and Theological Study
Shab.	Shabbat
Sheb.	Shebiit
Sheq.	Sheqalim
Sukk.	Sukkah
Ta'an.	Ta'anit

All other abbreviations follow the *SBL Handbook of Style*.

Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the Bible are from the ESVUK.  
All quotations from the Apocrypha are from the NRSVA.

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# Introduction

## 1.1 Preliminary Remarks

Jesus' relationship to the Law is a highly debated subject in NT scholarship and often regarded as a key factor in the development of nascent Christianity. Did Jesus faithfully observe the Torah and expect his followers to do the same? Did he revise it, dismissing distinctively Jewish customs while upholding its ethical demands? Or did Jesus abrogate it or consider it passé in view of eschatological fulfilment? These are some of the questions that come into focus in the process of determining the extent of Jesus' 'Jewishness' and whether he considered himself and his community as representative of Judaism. This study examines the role of Torah observance in Jesus' mission as a miracle prophet and teacher as recorded in the Synoptic tradition.

It is frequently argued that the English word 'law' and the Greek equivalent νόμος do not adequately translate the Hebrew word Torah (תורה), which has a broader meaning of 'instruction' or 'teaching'.<sup>1</sup> While there is truth to this claim, the use of νόμος in the Septuagint indicates that this was a common way of referring to the Pentateuch, which is also evident in the NT writings. Thus, the terms Torah and Law are used interchangeably in this study, with one main difference in approach to other treatments of the subject: Jesus perceived the Torah through the lens of prophetic tradition, from the standpoint of first-century Jewish culture. To Jesus, the Law and Prophets were inextricably linked, which is most evident in what is widely regarded as Jesus' most explicit statement about the Torah (Matt 5.17-19). Thus, in a pure sense, the analysis of 'Jesus' attitude towards the Law' is somewhat artificial, since Jesus presents no major distinction between them; the prophets reinforced Torah observance, albeit in a way they deemed as *true* adherence to the Mosaic covenant. In addition, Jesus' message always accented action over attitude in relation to a

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<sup>1</sup> See S. Westerholm, 'Torah, *Nomos* and the Law' in P. Richardson and S. Westerholm (eds), *Law in Religious Communities in the Roman Period: The Debate Over Torah and Nomos in Post-Biblical Judaism and Early Christianity*, *Studies in Christianity and Judaism* 4 (Waterloo: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, 1991), 45-56; J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus: Vol. 4, Law and Love* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 10-11, 26-73.

variegated body of decrees not only including a ‘legal system’ but also ‘the entire practical side and much of the inner dynamic of the Jewish religion’.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, this analysis seeks to determine whether Jesus’ ‘call to action’ entailed a return to Torah obedience or an adherence to a new or modified ethical and ritual standard.

This chapter provides a brief overview of major scholarship on the subject, which is divided into two sections. First, we consider major contributions that are classified within historical Jesus research (§1.2.1). Since this is an area of study that has, especially in recent years, placed a greater emphasis on Jesus’ Jewish context, the question of Jesus and the Torah plays an essential part in that analysis. The second section examines some major works that have specifically addressed the subject of Jesus’ attitude towards the Law (§1.2.2). Lastly, we discuss our approach and provide an overview of the chapters (§1.3).

## **1.2 Previous Research**

### *1.2.1 Historical Jesus Research*

Recent scholarship often classified under the umbrella of ‘historical Jesus’ research is particularly relevant to this study. Since a noticeable trend in such research highlights the importance of placing Jesus in his religious and cultural milieu of first-century Judaism, the heartbeat of that context –the Torah—has taken centre stage in this discussion. Although this approach incorporates data from other traditions like the Gospel of John and the Gospel of Thomas, scholars primarily focus on Synoptic material to the extent that the ‘historical Jesus’ and the ‘Synoptic Jesus’ have become somewhat synonymous terms.<sup>3</sup> Another difference worthy of mention is that while such scholars draw heavily from the Synoptic Gospels, they disagree on what parts authentically represent the real Jesus, the Jesus of history. These differences aside, the various contributions of historical Jesus studies provide valuable information to the ongoing debate concerning the Synoptic Jesus and the Law.

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<sup>2</sup> A.E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 36; cf. P.S. Alexander, ‘Jewish Law in the Time of Jesus: Towards a Clarification of the Problem’ in B. Lindars (ed.), *Law and Religion: Essays on the Place of the Law in Israel and Early Christianity* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1988), 44-58.

<sup>3</sup> See M.M. Thompson, ‘The Historical Jesus and the Johannine Christ’ in R.A. Culpepper and C.C. Black (eds), *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 21-42, citing 21.



In the wake of eighteenth-century rationalism, European scholars, *en vogue* of Enlightenment optimism and post-Reformation scepticism, began the ambitious enterprise of unearthing the historical identity of Jesus from beneath layers of centuries-old religious tradition. As each reconstruction was published, the ‘quest of the historical Jesus’ gained a momentum that would eventually take the Western world of NT studies by storm. The fundamental premise of the quest was that by using various tools of historical-criticism, authentic biographical information about Jesus’ life and teachings could be recovered while simultaneously identifying and removing the overlying strata of theology developed by the early Christian community. As new theories sparked controversy and further aberrance of traditionalist thought, one thing was indisputable—the search for a ‘historical Jesus’ was far from homogeneous; it was a convoluted quest, with many paths of various orientations that often intersected and sometimes led in opposite directions. This was particularly true concerning the subject of Jesus’ Jewish identity and his attitude towards the Torah. While scholars such as David F. Strauss (1808-1874) reaffirmed a devout Jewish context, arguing that ‘Jesus remain[ed] faithful to the paternal law’ without ‘infringing the precepts of Moses’,<sup>4</sup> another trend in scholarship grew to obliterate his Semitic origins entirely, often asserting the view of a mixed or predominantly Gentile Galilee.

A notable example of the latter view is Ernest Renan’s *Life of Jesus* (1863), which became somewhat a sensation across Europe, selling more than 60,000 copies after its initial release.<sup>5</sup> Devoted to aesthetic feeling, the French scholar went to great creative lengths to recreate a backdrop of first-century Galilee, highlighting its diverse ethnic population, some of which had converted to the Jewish religion. Beginning as a reformer within Judaism, Renan’s Jesus undergoes a transformative process and emerges as something *other*—‘a destroyer of Judaism’<sup>6</sup> who abrogates the ‘narrow, hard, and uncharitable Law’ given to Israel.<sup>7</sup> Thus, he concludes: ‘Jesus is no longer a Jew’,<sup>8</sup> though he is vague about whether Jesus was ethnically Jewish at the outset.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> D.F. Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (2nd edn; London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1898), 298.

<sup>5</sup> L.F. Mott, *Ernest Renan* (New York: Appleton, 1921), 236.

<sup>6</sup> E. Renan, *Life of Jesus* (trans. of 23rd French edn; Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1923), 240.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

Other scholarly assertions were even more radical. Houston S. Chamberlain (1855-1927), argued that the Jewish population of Galilee had been a small minority ever since the Assyrian conquest, leading him to infer: ‘The probability that Christ was no Jew, that he had not a drop of genuinely Jewish blood in his veins, is so great that it is almost equivalent to a certainty.’<sup>10</sup> Such preposterous assertions would, of course, have grievous implications for the rise of anti-Jewish sentiments in Europe. World-renowned German scholar and Tübingen professor, Gerhard Kittel (1888-1948), chief editor of the classic *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, also perpetuated such biases in his publications.<sup>11</sup> As a leading authority in rabbinic literature and Hebrew, exemplified in his critical editions of the Mishnah and Tosefta, Kittel also paradoxically produced a volume of anti-Semitic propaganda for the Third Reich.<sup>12</sup> Such views were not uncommon during this time, as many Christian Protestants believed they were continuing the aims of Martin Luther, initiating a new Reformation by uprooting every trace of Judaism in the church and theology.<sup>13</sup> The Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life was established in 1939 to accomplish this very purpose.<sup>14</sup> Its academic director, Walter Grundmann (1906-1976), a pupil and close companion of Kittel, staunchly argued in favour of an Aryan Jesus and predominantly Hellenized Galilee by appealing to a variety of scholarly studies in theology, geography, and racial theory.<sup>15</sup> The lasting impact of Kittel and Grundmann upon theology cannot be underestimated, for their contributions in the TDNT continue to be used in seminaries today. Although most scholarship did not share this anti-Semitic attitude, depictions of Galilee and negative stereotypes about Judaism and the Torah were quite commonplace in German academia.

In stark contrast to such developments, many important contributions had very little impact in Europe, where anti-Semitism and intolerance of Judaism were reaching a fever pitch. Perhaps the greatest achievement of this period belongs to historian and professor of Hebrew literature at the University of Jerusalem, Joseph G. Klausner (1874-1958), who

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<sup>10</sup> H.S. Chamberlain, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 1 (London: John Lane, 1910), 211-12.

<sup>11</sup> See P.M. Casey, ‘Some Anti-Semitic Assumptions in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament’ in *NovT* 41.3 (1999), 280-91.

<sup>12</sup> A.E. Steinweis, *Studying the Jew: Scholarly Antisemitism in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 66-67.

<sup>13</sup> S. Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 11; Geza Vermes, *The Real Jesus: Then and Now* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 32.

<sup>14</sup> Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 88-91.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 152-61.

became the first Jewish scholar to produce a critical work on the life of Jesus in the Hebrew language. His book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, published in 1922 with an English edition in 1925, continues to be recognized as a landmark in historical Jesus studies. Together with Herbert Danby, Klausner was instrumental in challenging the prevalent bias in New Testament scholarship, observing that ‘nearly all the many Christian scholars, and even the best of them, who have studied the subject deeply, have tried their hardest to find in the historic Jesus something which is not Judaism’.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, Klausner presented Jesus as a Jew within Judaism, somewhat similar to Jesus’ contemporary Pharisees, whose positive attitude toward the Law enabled Jesus to be ‘a great teacher of morality and an artist in parable’.<sup>17</sup>

Considered Israel’s foremost scholar on the historical Jesus, David Flusser (1917-2000) employed a vast breadth of knowledge in Jewish literature, philology, history, and archaeology into his study of the Synoptics and the Dead Sea Scrolls. His 1968 book *Jesus*, which was later updated in 1997 with R. Steven Notley, offered a fresh perspective on the life of Jesus along with new insights on his first-century Jewish setting. As an orthodox Jew, Flusser rejected the notion that he was simply following a Jewish Jesus trend, stressing instead his dedicated commitment to objective critical-historical research. This is evident in his acknowledgement of Jesus’ claims both as a miracle-working prophet and messianic ‘Son of Man’. According to Notley, ‘Flusser felt no need to deny Jesus his high self-awareness’ in contrast to other Jewish depictions of Jesus that showed a tendency to present an unoriginal Pharisee whose message was largely embellished by a Hellenized church.<sup>18</sup> Equally significant is Flusser’s observation of Jesus’ faithfulness to the Mosaic covenant, operating entirely within the confines of first-century Judaism. He recognized the tension that existed between the Pharisees and Jesus, but posited that the locus of friction was over the development of traditions that occurred during the Second-Temple era. Flusser’s research impacted an entire generation of Jewish and Christian scholars, such as David Bivin and Brad Young, who have published various works on Jesus as a Jewish rabbi.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> J. Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times, and Teaching* (tr. H. Danby; New York: Macmillan, 1929), 105.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 413.

<sup>18</sup> D. Flusser and R.S. Notley, *The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus’ Genius* (4th edn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), xi.

<sup>19</sup> D. Bivin, *New Light on the Difficult Words of Jesus: Insights from His Jewish Context* (Holland, MI: En Gedi Resource Center, 2005); B. H. Young, *Jesus the Jewish Theologian* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995);

Historical Jesus research from the 1970s onward has placed a greater emphasis on Jesus' first-century Jewish milieu. Despite this gradual shift, some scholars who identify with the Jesus Seminar, have continued relying on methodology, such as the criterion of double dissimilarity, that produces critical portraits of Jesus in major discontinuity with Judaism. According to John D. Crossan, the Jesus of history was 'a peasant Jewish Cynic' within a Galilean setting largely influenced by Graeco-Roman culture.<sup>20</sup> Burton L. Mack similarly locates Jesus beyond the sphere of Judaism: 'The Cynic analogy repositions the historical Jesus away from a specifically Jewish sectarian milieu and toward the Hellenistic ethos known to have prevailed in Galilee'.<sup>21</sup> Speaking in memorable aphorisms, he roamed the peasant villages of Israel like a barefoot Greek philosopher, preaching a counter-cultural message for an egalitarian society and unmediated access to the divine. As a secular Jew, he did not preoccupy himself with Jewish ideologies concerning the kingdom of heaven, eschatology, or matters of the Torah. Such a radical, non-traditional reconstruction of the Nazarene has received an abundance of media attention, but evidence from recent archaeological excavations in Galilee poses a serious challenge to this view.

Hungarian Jewish scholar Geza Vermes, a world-renowned pioneer in the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls, also produced very influential works on the historical Jesus, including *Jesus the Jew* (1973) and *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (1993). As many of these titles suggest, Vermes' collective research locates Jesus within Judaism, comparing him with other charismatic Hasidim, such as Honi the Circle Drawer and Hanina ben Dosa.<sup>22</sup> Such itinerant wonder-workers endured criticism from the Pharisees of their day concerning their unconventional behaviour, as well as an apparent laxity concerning purity laws. The historical Jesus, therefore, blends in with the charismatic Judaism of Second-Temple Galilee, drawing crowds with healings and exorcisms, while captivating them with his parabolic teaching. Although clashing with the Pharisees over minor matters, the Synoptic Gospels present an observant Jew who keeps the feasts, upholds the priestly rites, and teaches with 'an all-pervading concern with the ultimate purpose of the Law'.<sup>23</sup> The

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idem, *Meet the Rabbis: Rabbinic Thought and the Teachings of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> J.D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 421; emphasis omitted.

<sup>21</sup> B.L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 73.

<sup>22</sup> G. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981 [1973]), 58-82.

<sup>23</sup> G. Vermes, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 44-45.

uniqueness of Jesus' message, however, can be seen in his prophetic declarations concerning the proximity of the kingdom of heaven, which Jesus anticipated during his lifetime.

E.P. Sanders is an outspoken voice in the reassessment of the dominant Christian caricature of Judaism, often portrayed as a legalistic religion devoid of grace. Following the success of *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977), Sanders produced a number of books on the historical Jesus including *Jesus and Judaism* (1985), *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: Five Studies* (1990), and *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (1993). His research is noteworthy for broadening the scope of previous quests in two main ways. First, Sanders proposes that a sound analysis should not be limited to Jesus' sayings, but include his deeds as well. Second, he argues against the criterion of double-dissimilarity. Incorporating the methodological approach of Klausner, Sanders asserts that sound critical-historical research must place Jesus believably within his first-century Jewish milieu and simultaneously explain why the movement he started parted ways with Judaism.<sup>24</sup> This progressive shift has been instrumental in the renewed interest to recognize Jesus within Judaism.

Sanders presents Jesus as an eschatological prophet of Jewish restoration who assumed a principal role in the coming kingdom as God's 'viceroys' or 'emissaries'.<sup>25</sup> Like Vermes, Sanders maintains that Jesus did not oppose the law nor abolish it. Obedience to the Torah was normative among first-century Jews and a sign that one identified with Israel, retaining covenant membership. Although Christian scholarship has been inclined to underscore the tension between Jesus and his contemporaries, according to Sanders, 'there was no substantial conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees with regard to Sabbath, food, and purity laws'.<sup>26</sup> Yet in contrast to Vermes, he denies the authenticity of the Markan controversy stories (e.g., Mark 7.1-23) and the Matthean statements in favour of Torah, rejecting the entire section of the Sermon on the Mount apart from the prayer.<sup>27</sup> Concerning some of Jesus' more radical demands, like his teaching on divorce, Sanders argues that a position more stringent than the demands of the Law should not be equated with an attack against Moses. On the other hand, Sanders concedes that Jesus may not have regarded the 'Mosaic dispensation to be final or absolutely binding'.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 18; cf. Klausner, *Jesus*, 9-12.

<sup>25</sup> E.P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1993), 238-48.

<sup>26</sup> Sanders, *Jesus*, 265.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 261-63.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

N.T. Wright is a leading New Testament scholar who has written two relevant books centred on the life of Jesus: *The New Testament and the People of God* (1992) and *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996). Wright criticizes previous scholarship for their failure to acknowledge Jesus' first-century Jewishness, maintaining that 'Jesus must be understood as a comprehensible and yet, so to speak, crucifiable first-century Jew, whatever the theological or hermeneutical consequences'.<sup>29</sup> What made Jesus 'crucifiable' was his radical stance on Jewish practice, which Wright principally identifies in terms of 'boundary markers',<sup>30</sup> 'badges',<sup>31</sup> and 'symbols'<sup>32</sup> that served to distinguish Jew from Gentile. Wright makes this case by contending that three of the four primary distinctives of Judaism (Sabbath, diet, circumcision, and Temple) are the causes of some of the controversies found in the Synoptics.<sup>33</sup> While Jesus was not against the Law *per se*, he 'implicitly and explicitly attacked what had become standard symbols of the Second-Temple Jewish worldview' in light of the dawning kingdom of God.<sup>34</sup> His aims were to reconstitute a new Israel around himself as the promised messiah and break down walls of ethnocentricity. This set Jesus' message at complete odds with the religious and social norms of his Jewish contemporaries, whom Wright broadly paints as ethnocentric, zealous defenders of 'nationalistic symbols' (i.e., Sabbath, food laws, circumcision, Land, and Temple).<sup>35</sup> Whether cryptically or openly, by relaxing the commandments of Moses or, as Wright puts it, setting 'time bombs'<sup>36</sup> beside the identity markers of Israel, Jesus found himself condemned both as a criminal and a false prophet 'leading Israel astray'.<sup>37</sup>

New Testament scholar, Dale C. Allison, has produced numerous works on Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet, including *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet* (1998), *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpreters* (2005), and *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (2010). Allison promotes a Jesus rooted in Judaism whose chief objective was centred in the end-time restoration of Israel. By aligning himself with the anointed figure of Isaianic prophecy, Jesus boldly asserted a

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<sup>29</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 86. A similar perspective to Klausner and Sanders.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 398.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 432; *idem*, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 238.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 369-442; 437.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 389.

<sup>34</sup> N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was & Is* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 55; *idem*, *Jesus*, 390.

<sup>35</sup> Wright, *Jesus*, 390.

<sup>36</sup> Wright, *Challenge of Jesus*, 61.

<sup>37</sup> Wright, *Jesus*, 372.

central role in the denouement of God's story, with clear messianic connotations. In regard to Jesus' attitude toward the Torah, Allison postulates a more complex approach, opposing both conservative and liberal caricatures.<sup>38</sup> Since the gospel traditions present one who intensifies the commandments and at other times relaxes them, Jesus himself is the 'contriver of our dilemma'.<sup>39</sup> However, when he did break the Torah, he did so without any intention of abolishing it or promoting antinomianism. Jesus, like Hillel and others, understood that there were exceptions, especially when one must choose between two moral imperatives. On the other hand, the tone of his teaching also conveyed a criticism of Mosaic legislation, that its instruction was inadequate for godly living and needed revising. With this in view, Allison regards the more conservative Matthean traditions that endorse the Law and Prophets (e.g., Matt. 5:17) as inauthentic.<sup>40</sup> However, when Jesus advocated an abandonment of Torah principles, it was in light of eschatology and a 'return to Edenic standards', not impiety.<sup>41</sup> Allison locates the impetus of Jesus' movement, therefore, in the crisis of the imminent end of the age, and views Jesus' posture toward Moses as somewhat enigmatic and inconsistent.

In *Law and Love* (2009), the fourth volume of the series, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, John P. Meier contends that Jesus' teachings and unconventional life pushed him to the fringes of first-century Judaism. Unlike scribes and rabbis who operated within a more organized religious infrastructure, Jesus pioneered his own path by enacting the role of an 'eschatological prophet and miracle-worker clothed in the aura of Elijah'.<sup>42</sup> His uniqueness also lay in his self-perceived authority to interpret and edit the Mosaic Law in the way he deemed suitable for the last days. Yet according to Meier, this bold conviction did not stem from a messianic claim, but his role as a charismatic prophet, proclaiming the imminent appearance of God's kingdom, evidenced in miracles. Like Vermes, Meier castigates academic theologians' attempts at presenting 'Jesus the Jew' while failing to deal adequately with the 'beating heart' of such Jewishness, the Torah, and the principal role it played in first-century Palestine.<sup>43</sup> Although Meier

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<sup>38</sup> D.C. Allison, Jr., *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpreters* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 196.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>41</sup> Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 193.

<sup>42</sup> J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus: Vol. 2, Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1045.

<sup>43</sup> Meier, *Law and Love*, 648.

dismisses as nonsensical any portrayal of Jesus abrogating the Mosaic Law outright, he recognizes an incoherent approach in his interpretation and teaching, conceding that Jesus' stance toward the Torah is somewhat enigmatic.<sup>44</sup> While Jesus upheld the Sabbath, he stepped beyond the bounds of normative Jewish *halakha* by prohibiting divorce and oath-taking. The historical Jesus was also strangely silent on the subject of ritual impurity, making him stand out like a 'sore theological thumb'.<sup>45</sup> However, Meier proposes that such discontinuity can be resolved by understanding Jesus' self-perception as a charismatic prophet who taught from an 'eschatological vantage point' with the restoration of the created order in view.<sup>46</sup>

Bruce Chilton has produced numerous books with the prominent Jewish scholar Jacob Neusner including *Judaism in the New Testament: Practices and Beliefs* (1995) and *The Missing Jesus: Rabbinic Judaism and the New Testament* (2002). His other works include *Jesus in Context: Temple, Purity, and Restoration* (1997) and *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography* (2000), which is a creative 'life of Jesus' reincarnation, depicting the Nazarene as an 'illiterate *chasid* from Galilee' in pursuit of kabbalistic nirvana. Both Chilton and Neusner contend that Jesus perceived himself as 'an Israelite within the framework of the Torah' and 'a Jew who practiced Judaism'.<sup>47</sup> However, although some of his moral imperatives are in harmony with later rabbinic writings, Jesus significantly 'revises the received commandments, imposing a higher standard for the Christian way of life'.<sup>48</sup> By drawing a sharp distinction between 'right and rite', Jesus eliminated purity rules and dietary restrictions for his followers.<sup>49</sup> Yet even with a high regard for inner purity, Jesus was not consistent; his teaching violated the charge to honour one's parents, and he himself struggled with 'prejudice and xenophobia'.<sup>50</sup> Another drastic shift from Jewish norms was the fellowship meals that Jesus instituted as a purer alternative to the Temple

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<sup>44</sup> To further the complexity, Meier regards a large bulk of the Synoptic material on Torah-related matters as historically inauthentic. For example, see Meier, *Law*, 413.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 414.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 296, 654.

<sup>47</sup> B.D. Chilton and J. Neusner, *Judaism in the New Testament: Practices and Beliefs* (London: Routledge, 1995), xiv.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 150-51; cf. J. Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 136-37.

<sup>50</sup> B.D. Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 2000) 181; Neusner, *Rabbi Talks*, 57.



cult.<sup>51</sup> Thus, in many ways, this portrait of Jesus by Chilton and Neusner appears more antithetical to the fundamentals of the Torah than simply one operating within its framework. The contrast between Jesus and Judaism is made more sharply by Neusner, who contends that Jesus spoke ‘not as a sage nor as a prophet’<sup>52</sup> but as an ‘outsider’<sup>53</sup> bearing a closer resemblance to Baalam than the prophets of Israel.

Another scholar who has rooted Jesus firmly within Judaism is Marcus Bockmuehl. His notable works include *This Jesus: Martyr, Lord, Messiah* (1994) and *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics* (2000). Bockmuehl contends that first and foremost, Jesus must be understood as a ‘devout first-century Palestinian Jew’ who did not aim to start a new religion.<sup>54</sup> Jesus was not a member of any official sect of Judaism, but shared many views of the Pharisees, with whom he often debated. His ministry in many ways resembled the Galilean charismatic miracle-workers like Honi or Hanina ben Dosa, but Jesus anticipated the imminent realization of the Kingdom of God and aspired to become the redeemer of Israel. Although some of Jesus’ contemporaries undoubtedly considered his standard less stringent than their own, there is ‘little evidence that Jesus deliberately contravened the Torah in any substantive point’.<sup>55</sup> His teaching emphasized the weightier matters of the Torah, but did not abolish the ritualistic commandments therein. Thus Bockmuehl presents a Jesus wholly consistent in his observance of Moses, both morally and ritually.

New Testament scholar, Craig A. Evans, is an accomplished author and editor of over sixty books encompassing the historical Jesus, biblical archaeology, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. In *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies* (2001), Evans examines Jesus’ historical and cultural context, including an analysis of messianism in early Jewish literature and various historical sources. In *The Missing Jesus: Rabbinic Judaism and the New Testament* (2002) and *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels* (2006) he challenges the Cynic view of both Crossan and Mack, while presenting a devout Jewish Jesus from the canonical Gospels. Evans argues that the evidence collectively supports that Jesus did, in fact, perceive himself not only to be a rabbi and prophet, but the

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<sup>51</sup> B.D. Chilton and J. Neusner, *Comparing Spiritualities: Formative Christianity and Judaism on Finding Life and Meeting Death* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 2000), 116-22; cf. Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus*, 89, 255.

<sup>52</sup> Neusner, *Rabbi Talks*, 47.

<sup>53</sup> Neusner, *Rabbi Talks*, 52.

<sup>54</sup> M. Bockmuehl, *This Jesus: Martyr, Lord, Messiah* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1994), 119.

<sup>55</sup> M. Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), viii.

Son of God and the Davidic Messiah.<sup>56</sup> Unlike Wright, Evans locates the cause of Jesus' death in his messianic message of the kingdom, because it 'threatened the political establishment' and not because he overturned the ancient praxis of Judaism.<sup>57</sup> 'Jesus accepted all the major tenets of the Jewish faith', including synagogue attendance and Temple worship, and his scripturally based teachings presuppose a deep respect and submission to the Torah as authoritative.<sup>58</sup> With this in view, the controversies within the Gospels regarding Sabbath and purity matters reveal the tension between Jesus' lighter interpretation and the more burdensome Pharisaic *halakha*, not Jesus vis-à-vis Moses.<sup>59</sup>

Although there are many scholars who have written on the Jewishness of Jesus in recent years, a few others deserve particular attention. Amy-Jill Levine has published numerous articles and books in recent years, including *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (2006), contending that Jesus' attitude toward the Torah was 'not liberal, but highly conservative'.<sup>60</sup> Similar perspectives are found in the works of Pinchas Lapide, Peter J. Tomson, Anthony J. Saldarini, and Craig S. Keener who argue in favour of a Jesus who devoutly observes the Torah.

### 1.2.2 Jesus and the Law Research

Some important contributions in the specific area of Jesus' relationship to the Law are especially relevant to this study and are often cited in scholarship. The first is a book by Robert Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition* (1975), which was significant as the first comprehensive treatment on the subject since the work of B.H. Branscomb in 1930.<sup>61</sup> Banks' book reflects the shift in scholarship concerning negative stereotypes about the Law and obedience to it, and, equally important, shows from the OT and a wide range of Jewish literature that Judaism had no expectation for a termination, alteration, or replacement of the Torah.<sup>62</sup> Despite this conclusion, Banks' assessment of the Synoptic tradition leaves one with the overall impression that Jesus' approach to the Law was

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<sup>56</sup> C.A. Evans, *Jesus and his Contemporaries: Comparative Studies* (Boston: Brill, 2001), 451-456.

<sup>57</sup> C.A. Evans, *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 232.

<sup>58</sup> Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, 223.

<sup>59</sup> Evans, *Matthew*, NCBC (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), 249.

<sup>60</sup> A.J. Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 47.

<sup>61</sup> B.H. Branscomb, *Jesus and the Law of Moses* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1930).

<sup>62</sup> R.J. Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition*, SNTSMS 28 (Cambridge: CUP, 1975), 15-85. Contra W.D. Davies, *Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come*, SBLMS 7 (Philadelphia: SBL, 1952), 84-94.

unprecedented. Jesus saw the Torah as prophetically pointing to and reaching fulfilment in his teaching and ministry. Thus, it is not about Jesus' relation to the Law, but the Law's relation to Jesus that matters. Jesus felt no obligation to adhere to Mosaic legislation. His ambivalence toward Jewish customs is best understood in light of the precedence he gave to his mission; any adherence to Jewish practice was only useful when it would serve to springboard his message. Although Banks argues against the view that Jesus abrogated or transcended the Law and rejects both labels of 'conservative' and 'radical' in his assessment of Jesus,<sup>63</sup> his arguments appear to be somewhat contradictory. He contends that Jesus' demands not only fulfil but also terminate the law, and how this differs from abrogation is not clear.<sup>64</sup> Banks also speaks of Jesus 'transcending', 'supplanting', 'surpassing', sidestepping, and transforming the Torah.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, his conclusion that Jesus' teaching is both unparalleled and 'radical' with reference to other Jewish literature appears to be at odds with his previous assertions.<sup>66</sup>

A similar approach that identifies 'fulfilment' as the hermeneutical key to understanding the issue is presented in the article, 'Jesus and the Authority of the Mosaic Law' (1984), by Evangelical scholar Douglas Moo. While his analysis centres on the relevance of the Law to the Christian life, Moo carefully assesses a variety of viewpoints and offers his own analysis from the Synoptic tradition. As regards the Torah, Moo posits that 'it cannot be demonstrated that Jesus personally violated any of its commands'.<sup>67</sup> Still, Moo postulates that although Jesus himself remained Torah observant, this does not necessarily imply that he expected his followers to emulate his behaviour. Jesus, after all, was living in a period of transition between two dispensations, and the old age of Torah was coming to an end in his ministry. While he upheld the Law in principle, it did not form an essential part of his instruction concerning the righteous standard that he set for his community. As the new authority of Israel, 'he takes up the law into himself and enunciates what is enduring in its contents'.<sup>68</sup> Thus, because of Jesus' special status and his 'intuitive knowledge of God's will', he was able to filter the contents of the Law, affirming the validity of some and abolishing others. Indeed, Jesus' principle as stated in Mark 7.15 was

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 203, 249-50, 163, 145, 242-43.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>67</sup> D.J. Moo, 'Jesus and the Authority of the Mosaic Law', *JSNT* 20 (1984), 5.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 29.

destined to abrogate major parts of the Torah.<sup>69</sup> As the culmination of the Law, Jesus was endowed with legislative sovereignty to alter the applicability of certain Mosaic commands and add his own directives alongside the remaining requirements of Moses.

James D.G. Dunn, a scholar who has also made many contributions to historical Jesus research, examined Jesus' stance on the Law in *Jesus, Paul and the Law* (1990). In this work, Dunn argues that despite the different contexts of Jesus and Paul, they both dismissed the concept of 'covenantal nomism', that a proper response to God's covenant was obedience to the distinctive observances of Jewish adherence. In his assessment of the controversies found in Mark, he argues that Jesus challenged many of the central identity or boundaries markers of Israel including Sabbath and purity laws surrounding food.<sup>70</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that throughout history other Jewish rabbis have also made seemingly radical statements, the wider context of their teaching, Dunn argues, determines whether such statements should be taken in opposition to Torah or not. In the case of Jesus, his frequent contrast of ritual and moral purity indicates that his teaching must be taken as something more revolutionary.<sup>71</sup> Even the more conservative stance of Jesus and the Torah that Matthew presents, 'bursts the wineskins of Judaism'.<sup>72</sup>

Alan Watson's study *Jesus and the Law* (1996) favours the view of Eduard Schweizer, contending that Jesus abolished the Law and showed very little regard for keeping it. In comparison to Matthew and Luke, Mark presents the most accurate and coherent picture of Jesus as one who radically transgressed the essentials of Jewish law, such as Sabbath, purity, and food laws, which served as barriers to separate Jew from Gentile. The end result was that 'Jews would no longer appear to be God's chosen people'.<sup>73</sup> Watson, however, contends that Jesus emulated the prophet Isaiah, but not as one restoring people back to Torah; he oddly seems to suggest that Isaiah opposed Torah observances, such as Sabbath, festivals, and even purity laws, and in contrast to Temple rites, emphasized good deeds as a fundamental part of authentic worship.<sup>74</sup> At the same time, Watson acknowledges the importance of identifying Jesus as a Jew within a Jewish setting, largely unaffected by Hellenistic influence.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>70</sup> J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 27-28, 52.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>73</sup> A. Watson, *Jesus and the Law* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1996), 3.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 112-14.

One of the largest and most comprehensive treatments on the subject in recent years, which includes portrayals of Jesus in the Gospels of John and Thomas, is *Jesus' Attitude Towards the Law* (1997) by William R.G. Loader. In this work, Loader contends that the Gospel accounts all present diverse perspectives when it comes to Jesus' stance on the Law. Concerning the Synoptics, Loader depicts Matthew and Luke as largely conservative and pro-Torah. In addition, there are 'strong indicators of Jesus' Jewishness' in both of these accounts.<sup>75</sup> Mark, on other hand, 'rejects much of the Law' including dietary and purity laws and the validity of the Temple cult.<sup>76</sup> However, the Markan Jesus does not abrogate the Law, but rather 'dismiss[es] its value altogether'.<sup>77</sup> Despite this portrait of Jesus, Loader holds 'it is possible to detect an overlay of Markan radicalism'.<sup>78</sup> In various places in the text, Mark cannot prevent a conservative Jesus from showing his face.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, according to Loader, the evidence suggests that beneath these layers the controversy stories 'all indicate an attitude towards the Law which upholds it, but challenges the emphasis in interpreting it'.<sup>80</sup> Loader's approach is different from other scholars, such as Watson, who show a strong tendency to regard Mark as the evangelist who presents the truer account of Jesus. However, his perspective of the Markan Jesus as generally radical in his approach to the Torah is widely held.

Another lengthy study is Tom Holmén's *Jesus and Jewish Covenant Thinking* (2001), a revised version of his dissertation that was published in 1999. Holmén evaluates Jesus' attitude to the Mosaic covenant by analysing Synoptic material related to various subjects including Sabbath, tithing, fasting, divorce, oaths, purity, and table-fellowship. On one hand, Holmén presents Jesus as one who generally kept the Law and considered himself 'profoundly Jewish';<sup>81</sup> on the other hand, he dismissed all 'covenant path markers' common to all branches of early Judaism, transgressing the Sabbath commandment and despising the Temple cult.<sup>82</sup> However, Jesus' attitude towards the Law cannot be classified in terms of him being 'for' or 'against' it,<sup>83</sup> nor did Jesus systematically set out to abrogate

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<sup>75</sup> W.R.G. Loader, *Jesus' Attitude Towards the Law: A Study of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 520.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 509.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 518.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 520.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 519.

<sup>81</sup> T. Holmén, *Jesus and Jewish Covenant Thinking*, *BibInt* 55 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 343.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 330-32.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

Jewish practise; rather, Jesus' attitude is best summarized as indifferent, and the Torah's demands he regarded as inadequate.<sup>84</sup> Although Holmén concedes that Jesus may have viewed his own community and teaching as a purer form of Judaism—perhaps in relation to eschatological expectation of a new covenant—it is equally probable that Jesus had abandoned Jewish belief and the idea of covenant entirely.<sup>85</sup> Jesus' general approach to the Law was apparently so unique that even his closest disciples were not entirely sure how to categorize or clarify it. Similarly, Holmén's concluding thoughts avoid giving any definitive answer to explain Jesus' 'non-commented indifference' to the Torah.

In *The Date of Mark's Gospel: Insight from the Law in Earliest Christianity* (2004), James G. Crossley posits that the Gospel of Mark was written between 35 to 45 CE and bases much of that claim upon another proposition: The conservative portrait of Jesus found within Mark indicates that the work predates disputes over the Law that dominated the church in later years. Crossley therefore spends a considerable amount of time discussing Torah-related matters in the Synoptic Gospels and the Markan controversies surrounding Sabbath observance and purity laws. His conclusion is that all three Synoptics present a coherent message concerning Jesus' attitude and observance of the Law, namely that 'Jesus is portrayed as a Torah observant Jew in conflict with Jews dedicated to expanding and developing the biblical laws'.<sup>86</sup> While the Matthean Jesus' endorsement of Moses is commonly acknowledged in scholarship, Crossley's position that Mark consistently presents Jesus in conformity to the Law is a minority view, which he admits.<sup>87</sup> Despite this fact, Crossley's treatment of the Synoptic approach to Jesus and the Torah is another important contribution that reflects the diversity present in NT studies.

### 1.3 Approach and Overview

Considering the many diverse positions on Jesus and the Law, we begin by clarifying our approach and giving a brief overview of our study. This dissertation examines whether the Synoptic Jesus confirmed the importance of Torah observance in his life and message, especially pertaining to his prophetic ministry. Therefore, this study is limited to data

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 342.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 334-337; 342-43.

<sup>86</sup> J.G. Crossley, *The Date of Mark's Gospel: Insight from the Law in Earliest Christianity* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 123.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 82.

within the Synoptic tradition. The term ‘Synoptic Jesus’ does not negate the fact that differences exist within the traditions of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. However, it shall be argued that concerning Jesus and the Torah, these Gospels form a coherent and consistent portrait of Jesus. Thus, the common tendency in scholarship to heighten contrast between the Synoptic accounts—most notably a conservative Matthean Jesus with a more radical or liberal Markan Jesus—is reassessed in this study.<sup>88</sup> In addition, this Synoptic construct is not identical with that of the historical Jesus, which tends to be a scholarly reconstruction of Jesus primarily based on the Synoptic Gospels but draws from other traditions as well. Rather, our scope incorporates everything in Matthew, Mark, and Luke that pertains to the subject of Jesus and the Torah without setting aside relevant data as inauthentic.

In chapter 2, we start by examining the prevalence of Torah observance among first-century Jews and the influence of Hellenism, as well as the background to Jesus’ ministry, including his Galilean and familial contexts (§2.2). Following this, we study whether the Torah played a central role in Jesus’ day-to-day life and his mission as both rabbi and prophet (§2.3). The last section (§2.4) covers the importance of Torah in Jesus’ message and specifically addresses what Jesus meant by his claim to ‘fulfil’ the Law and Prophets and if the so-called ‘antitheses’ constitute a challenge to Moses.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to examining three major controversy stories involving Torah-related matters found within the Gospel of Mark, since scholars have frequently appealed to this account as representing the most radical—and often more historically accurate—portrait of Jesus. We examine conflicts over Sabbath observance (§3.2), food and purity (§3.3), and the Temple cult (§3.4), which are the principal passages that have been used as evidence to show that Jesus transgressed, abrogated, or dismissed the importance of the Law. Lastly, in chapter 4, we formulate our conclusions and offer some implications of the findings presented in our research, specifically addressing Jesus’ place in early Judaism.

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<sup>88</sup> Matthew’s presentation of Jesus is regarded by scholars to be conservative due to Jesus’ statements concerning the Law (e.g., Matt 5.17-20; 23.2-4, 23) and the parallel pericope of Mark 7.1-23 (Matt 15.1-20) has Jesus challenging Pharisaic tradition rather than dietary laws. By contrast, the Markan Jesus is typically portrayed as radical largely because of Mark 7.1-23—a passage that represents for many scholars Jesus’ break with Judaism and the entire purity system. While scholarly opinions of the Lukan Jesus vary, Luke is unique by underscoring the Torah piety of Jesus’ parents, by depicting Jesus as one who shares table fellowship with Pharisees (Luke 7.36; 11.37; 14.1), and presenting him as an active participant of both synagogue and Temple (even more so than Matthew’s account). For a more detailed assessment, see Loader, *Attitude*, 509-18.

## **A Devout Life and Ministry**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, we examine whether Jesus was devout in relation to the Torah. Since historical Jesus studies have demonstrated a weakness in the area of establishing Jesus within a Jewish milieu, we begin by contextualizing Jesus in his first-century Hebrew environment (§2.2). This includes an analysis of the religious climate within Israel and among Jews in general, the influence of Hellenism, the Galilean setting, and Jesus' familial context in order to examine what the Synoptic Gospels seek to convey in their presentation of related material. Second, we explore the Torah observance that Jesus displayed in both his personal life and charismatic mission (§2.3). To interpret Jesus and his relationship to the Law correctly, his role within Israel must be accurately defined. Lastly, we explore the statements of Jesus that explicitly affirm the Torah's on-going validity and determine whether his teaching replaces, modifies, or interprets the Law (§2.4).

### **2.2 A Torah-Centred Environment**

#### *2.2.1 Locating Jesus*

An accurate analysis of the life and ministry of Jesus must commence by identifying the cultural and religious environment that shaped and nurtured him. Contextualizing Jesus in first-century Palestine plays a pivotal role in interpretation, and yet biblical scholarship in this area has remained conspicuously deficient. Historically, there has been a tendency to paint the canvas of Galilee with loud Graeco-Roman colours amid muted tones of Jewish civilization. Research in more recent years has begun shifting focus, giving more attention to the historical setting of Galilee in light of ancient testimony and archaeological evidence.

No reputable scholar today would assert that Jesus' world was free from Greek influence. Martin Hengel persuasively contested the notion that sharp demarcations existed between Diaspora Judaism and Palestinian Judaism with regard to Hellenism. He argued



that from the third century BCE onward, ‘all Judaism must really be designated “Hellenistic Judaism”’ —an assertion that is now widely acknowledged.<sup>89</sup> But the extent of that influence is a matter of debate, with some scholars criticizing many of Hengel’s exaggerated claims regarding the pervasiveness of Greek education and language in Second-Temple Palestine.<sup>90</sup>

One major hurdle to understanding the context of Jesus is terminology. It has been noted that both terms ‘Judaism’ and ‘Hellenism’ fail to convey fully the atmosphere of Jesus’ world. ‘Judaism’ in a modern context encompasses religious belief and practise, whereas in first-century Palestine, the Torah governed every area of both spiritual and secular life, from daily diet to agricultural practises, from clothing to civil and criminal legislation.<sup>91</sup> While the military might of Rome fused multicultural and ethnic diversity into one empire, the gravity of Torah held the Jewish people together in unified reverence. It was the inherited contract of the covenant that bound them to God, their ancestors, and one another as fellow members of Israel. Although there were cycles of violent outbursts under Roman rule, often due to taxation and anti-idolic insensitivity, Jews were given exceptional privilege to retain their unique cultural heritage and practises prescribed by the Torah. In accordance with Rome’s tolerant disposition toward ancestral rites, an edict of Augustus granted Jews freedom to ‘follow their own customs in accordance with the law of their fathers’.<sup>92</sup> Remarkably, Jews were exempt from offering incense to Caesar, partaking in civic sacrifice, and appearing in court on the Sabbath. Cities with large Jewish populations were ordered to provide kosher meat in the marketplace, and synagogue attendance in Rome was made possible by granting the Jews the right to assemble. Jewish life under Roman imperialism was not devoid of tension, but various regulations safeguarded Torah praxis. The depiction of Jews being ‘separate in their meals and their beds’ is a rather contemptuous summation by Tacitus (*Histories* 5.5),<sup>93</sup> but it reveals the Torah piety that typified the Jewish people during this time.

The association of the term ‘Hellenism’ with Judaism must, therefore, be applied with caution and clarification as it can convey equivocal meanings. The adoption of

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<sup>89</sup> M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, Vol. 1 (tr. J. Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 104; emphasis omitted.

<sup>90</sup> See L.H. Feldman, ‘Hengel’s Judaism and Hellenism in Retrospect’, *JBL* 96.3 (1977), 371-82.

<sup>91</sup> Alexander, ‘Jewish Law’, 44-58; Vermes, *Religion of Jesus*, 11-13.

<sup>92</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 16.163 (Thackeray, LCL).

<sup>93</sup> M. Goodman, ‘Identity and Authority in Ancient Judaism’ in M. Goodman, *Judaism in the Roman World: Collected Essays*, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity, Vol. 66 (Boston: Brill, 2007), 23.

Grecian art, architecture, language, or religion can all be classified under the term. As stated by Hengel himself, 'it says too much, and precisely because of that it says too little'.<sup>94</sup> Certainly, Graeco-Roman influence is evident in thought and practise of first-century Jews, but this impact should be considered superficial in comparison to the influence of the Hebrew Scriptures. As C.A. Evans postulates, the world in which Jesus operated was 'fundamentally Jewish and fundamentally opposed to the syncretistic allure of its Graeco-Roman power-brokers'.<sup>95</sup>

All Judaism in the time of Jesus was Hellenistic Judaism. But there appears to be a general trend in scholarship to belabour differences existing in first-century Judaism (e.g., 'Judaisms') while often avoiding, almost entirely, the different degrees of Hellenistic influence that existed. Whether we call it 'common' or 'normal' Judaism, there was indeed a ruling set of beliefs and practises observed by all Jews, regardless of sect or differing *halakha*.<sup>96</sup> Although Josephus testifies to serious differences between rival Jewish sects (*Ant.* 13.298), he also presents Judaism as one of 'unity and identity of religious belief' with 'perfect uniformity in habits and customs' (*Ag. Ap.* 2.179 [Thackeray, LCL]). Allowing for exaggeration, Josephus' claim to a strong uniformity in Judaism should not be dismissed. In comparison to the Greek lawgivers, with their numerous conflicting myths, Moses' instruction was manifested in more universally concrete customs. The evidence suggests the existence of an 'orthopraxy in worldwide Judaism' and we may suspect that Hellenized influence varied depending on the city and region.<sup>97</sup> Adherence to the Torah as divine revelation given through Moses and incumbent upon all Israel was widespread. Its fundamental requirements such as circumcision, Sabbath, festivals, food laws (most notably the abstention from shellfish and pork), purity customs, and centralized temple worship, characterized the Jewish people in antiquity.<sup>98</sup> From a purely sociological perspective, we may regard the above (or some of them) as 'boundary markers' of Jewish ethnic identity. For most Jews, however, it was simply a proper response to God's holiness, in keeping with their inherited covenantal obligations.

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<sup>94</sup> M. Hengel, *The 'Hellenization' of Judea in the First Century after Christ* (tr. J. Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1989), 53.

<sup>95</sup> C.A. Evans, 'Introduction: Finding a Context for Jesus' in B. Chilton, C.A. Evans, and J. Neusner (eds), *The Missing Jesus: Rabbinic Judaism and the New Testament* (Boston: Brill, 2002), 1-10, citing 1.

<sup>96</sup> E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE-66 CE* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 47.

<sup>97</sup> Sanders, *Practice and Belief*, 237.

<sup>98</sup> Sanders, *Practice and Belief*, 235, proposes that Sabbath, circumcision, food, and purity were the 'main identifying marks of Jews'. Cf. P.R. Trebilco, 'Jewish backgrounds' in S.E. Porter (ed.), *A Handbook to the Exegesis of the New Testament* (Boston: Brill, 2002), 359-88, citing 361-63.

There is no indication of widespread Torah-laxity among Jews of the Diaspora, let alone Palestine. Josephus boldly asserts, ‘we are the most law-abiding of the nations’ (*Ag. Ap.* 2.150 [Thackeray, LCL]), and, ‘A transgressor is a rarity; evasion of punishment by excuses an impossibility’ (*Ag. Ap.* 2.178 [Thackeray, LCL]). Philo warns of inescapable myriads that were ‘full of zeal for the laws, strictest guardians of the ancestral institutions, merciless to those who do anything to subvert them’ (*Spec. Laws* 2.253 [Colson, LCL]). Following the death of Alexander the Great, those in Israel who transgressed Mosaic regulations concerning Sabbath and food laws deemed it better for them to flee to Samaria for safety than to face prosecution.<sup>99</sup> There is good reason to believe that such strictness of Torah observance was normative in Jesus’ day. Severe punishments, including public flogging, were no doubt operative.<sup>100</sup> According to the Mishnah, one who consumed unpermitted meat was subject to thirty-nine lashes (*m. Makkot* 3.2). Philo contended that Jews were more eager than all other nations to ‘preserve their own customs and laws’ (*Embassy* 210 [Colson, LCL]), and yet, according to another Alexandrian Jew, it was these ‘unbroken palisades and iron walls’ of ‘strict observances’ that preserved them.<sup>101</sup> Sanders concurs that as a unique people, they ‘really did stand out in Graeco-Roman culture because of their knowledge and observance of the law’.<sup>102</sup> The widely attested use of *tefillin*, from the Dead Sea to the Diaspora, exhibited the devotion to ancestral tradition characteristic of Second-Temple Jews.

Both Josephus and Philo give the same reason for Jewish piety: a propensity for education (Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 1.60; Philo, *Embassy* 210). Early Judaism fostered biblical literacy, because it was immersion in the knowledge of God that perpetuated obedience to his commandments. Childhood instruction was therefore an indispensable duty of both parent and community, and was even considered a *mitzvah* (cf. Deut 6.7; 11.19). According to Josephus, the Torah itself ‘orders that [children] shall be taught to read’ (*Ag. Ap.* 2.204 [Thackeray, LCL]) and the Mishnah indicates that biblical education began at the age of five (*m. Avot* 1.16). A reference to a father reading and teaching his sons the Law and Prophets (4. Macc 18.10-11) should contest the assumption that literacy was reserved for the religious elite.

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<sup>99</sup> *Ant.* 11.346-47.

<sup>100</sup> *Ant.* 4.238; Mark 13.9; Acts 5.40, 22.24; 2 Cor 11.23-25.

<sup>101</sup> *Let. Aris.* 139-42; trans. by R.J.H. Shutt, ‘Letter of Aristeeas’ in J.H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 2 (3rd edn; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 22.

<sup>102</sup> Sanders, *Jesus*, 191.

Perhaps the greatest indicator of the religious devotion exemplified by Second-Temple Jews is a ready willingness to die in lieu of compromise (Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 1.42; 2.232-35; Philo, *Embassy* 117). Just more than a century and a half before Jesus, Palestinian Jews were heavily oppressed by the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes for their unbending refusal to conform to Hellenized standards concerning idolatry, diet, and education. Although there were Jews who succumbed to his demands, his brutal attempt to eradicate Judaism failed: ‘But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die’ (1 Macc 1.62-63). Stories of martyrdom lay fresh in the minds of first-century Jews. A noble priest and a family of seven brothers, when given the ultimatum to consume pork or undergo horrendous torture, did not hesitate to choose the latter (2 Macc 6.18-7.42). Similarly, during the First Jewish Revolt (66-70 CE), the Essenes were ‘racked and twisted, burnt and broken, and made to pass through every instrument of torture, in order to induce them to blaspheme their lawgiver or to eat some forbidden thing’, yet they refused to compromise (*J.W.* 2.152 [Thackeray, LCL]). The Jewish people were well acquainted with suffering and their brazen stand for the Torah in adversity is testament to their commitment to covenantal living—such was the spiritual atmosphere in the time of Jesus.

### 2.2.2 Galilean Context

Prior to the 1970s, academic assertions about Galilee depicted the region as multi-ethnic and thoroughly Hellenized. Scholars like Emil Schürer went so far as to propose that Jews were but ‘a slender minority’.<sup>103</sup> While certain perceptions of Galilee have not changed in scholarship, careful examination of more recent data has led an increasing number of scholars to conclude differently. Important developments in Galilean archaeology took place in the 1970s and 80s. With the efforts of Eric Meyers and James Strange, who led many of these excavations, archaeology’s role in understanding the region became more prominent. The exciting discovery of Sepphoris, approximately four miles from Nazareth, led to a monumental shift in the perception of Galilee: Graeco-Roman buildings with elaborate mosaic floors, a theatre, and synagogue with zodiac artwork revealed a more urbanized setting. At first, such findings were used to substantiate the view of a Gentile

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<sup>103</sup> E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*, Vol. 2 (rev. edn; eds. G. Vermes, F. Millar, and M. Black; London: T&T Clark, 2014), 8.

dominated region, with Sepphoris, the wellspring of Graeco-Roman culture, influencing peasants like Jesus with Cynic philosophy. But as research continued, it became apparent that findings from the strata of the second and third centuries were being retrojected onto first-century Galilee.<sup>104</sup> After decades of analysis, archaeology corroborates ancient literary testimony: Galilee was predominantly Jewish and conservative.

In contrast to the surrounding areas of Gentile habitation (Syro-Phoenicia, Iturea, and the Decapolis), first-century strata of western Galilee reveal widespread use of Jewish pottery, stone vessels resistant to impurity, ritual washing pools (*mikva'ot*), objects with Jewish religious symbolism, and ossuaries, all of which confirm a Torah-observant Jewish population. This is especially true of Sepphoris, a 'thoroughly Jewish city', according to Evans, whose residents kept a kosher diet (virtually no pig bones were found in the city dump), and no traces of idolatrous shrines or gymnasiums have been unearthed.<sup>105</sup> Even coins minted in the region avoided human and pagan imagery in accordance with Jewish sensitivities. The fact that 'Gentiles are invisible in the archaeological record of most communities'<sup>106</sup> corroborates early sources that 'describe the area of Galilee as inhabited exclusively by Jews'.<sup>107</sup> Jesus' encounter with a centurion is the only instance recorded in the Gospels of a non-Jew in Galilee, and even then, the Jewish community highly respects him for building a synagogue (Luke 7.1-10; cf. Matt 8.5-13).

Synagogue remains are incontrovertible indicators of Judaism, primarily since they testify to a community observance of Sabbath, when Torah readings and prayers were commonplace. Although certain scholars have presented the synagogue as a post-70 CE phenomenon, thus discrediting Gospel accounts, excavations continue to show otherwise.<sup>108</sup> Now archaeologists acknowledge eight or nine first-century synagogues in Israel.<sup>109</sup> One important site dating to the time of Jesus, the synagogue at Magdala, features colourful frescoes, mosaic floors, and a rectangular stone depicting the seven-branched menorah of the Jerusalem Temple. Although its purpose remains in question, it probably served as a

<sup>104</sup> M.A. Chancey, *Graeco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus*, SNTSMS 134 (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 165, 229.

<sup>105</sup> C.A. Evans, *Jesus and His World: The Archaeological Evidence* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 2012), 23; cf. M. Chancey and E.M. Meyers, 'How Jewish Was Sepphoris in Jesus' Time?', *BAR* 26.4 (2000), 18-33.

<sup>106</sup> M.A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee: The Population of Galilee and New Testament Studies*, SNTSMS 118 (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 168.

<sup>107</sup> Goodman, 'Identity', 23.

<sup>108</sup> R.A. Horsley, *Archaeology, History and Society in Galilee: The Social Context of Jesus and The Rabbis* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 132, presents the following as fact: 'There were virtually no "synagogue" buildings until the third century C.E. and after in Palestine/Galilee.'

<sup>109</sup> Evans, *Jesus and His World*, 45.

table for Torah scrolls to be unrolled and read.<sup>110</sup> Ancient literary sources confirm that villages and synagogues possessed copies of biblical scrolls.<sup>111</sup> If a small town like Nazareth had access to Isaiah, then it would be reasonable to assume that copies of Scripture, especially the Law, were ubiquitous in first-century Palestine.

In comparison to their Judean counterparts, first-century Galileans were not less educated in the Torah or less committed to Torah observance. The evidence suggests that Galileans were diligent in their observance of purity laws and often made pilgrimage to Jerusalem to engage in temple worship. According to Schiffman, Galileans tended to be 'more stringent in regard to the law than their Judean coreligionists'.<sup>112</sup> Notwithstanding economic and political distinctives, the evidence suggests that the socio-religious link with Judea and Jerusalem was unbreakable. Therefore, depictions of the northern province with a prevailing 'Hellenistic ethos'<sup>113</sup> or a marked negligence in basic Torah observance tend to de-judaize the historical Jesus. Sanders sets the record straight: 'On the whole, in Antipas' Galilee, which was Jesus' Galilee, the law was Jewish, the courts were Jewish, the education was Jewish'.<sup>114</sup>

### 2.2.3 *Familial Context*

The Gospel of Luke provides most of the information we have of the early familial context of Jesus. The author intentionally begins his narrative with temple worship administered by the priest Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. Both he and his wife Elisabeth are described as being 'righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord' (Luke 1.6). Then Mary, the mother of Jesus, receives a heavenly message that she is highly favoured by the Lord (1.28, 30), and like her relative Elisabeth, will conceive by the power of God. The story of Jesus' youth is skilfully bookended by a pair of allusions to the story of the prophet Samuel. Mary's *Magnificat* parallels Hannah's prayer (1.46-55; cf. 1 Sam 2.1-10), and the concluding summation of Jesus' childhood development typifies Samuel: 'And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man' (2.52; cf. 1 Sam 2.26). Both Hannah and Samuel exemplified Jewish

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<sup>110</sup> See J. Corbett, 'New Synagogue Excavations In Israel and Beyond', *BAR* 37.4 (2011), 52-59.

<sup>111</sup> 1 Macc 1.56-57; Josephus, *J.W.* 2.229; *Life* 134.

<sup>112</sup> L.H. Schiffman, 'Was There a Galilean Halakhah?' in L.I. Levine (ed.), *The Galilee in Late Antiquity* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 143-56, citing 156.

<sup>113</sup> Mack, *Myth*, 73.

<sup>114</sup> E.P. Sanders, 'Jesus in Historical Context', *Theology Today* 50 (1993), 429-48, citing 440; cf. Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 20-21.

piety and were favoured by God. By interweaving these elements into his narrative, Luke sets the stage for the story of Jesus: the Nazarene is a true Israelite, and his family origins are pure.

Jesus' parents faithfully observe the requirements of the covenant. His father, Joseph, was not a scribe or priest, but his profession as a τέκτων (a craftsman of wood and stone; Matt 13.55) need not imply that he was unknowledgeable in the Law; working with one's hands was normative, even for Pharisees (Acts 18.3; *m. Avot* 1.10). Moreover, the description of Joseph as δίκαιος (Matt 1.19) does not refer to his graceful disposition toward Mary, but a צדיק designates one who faithfully observes the *mitzvot*.<sup>115</sup> Luke makes this emphatic, especially considering his repetition of their obedience (2.22-27, 39). As Fitzmyer observes, Luke's 'aim is to stress fidelity to the Mosaic Law', which remains a common theme throughout his two-volume work.<sup>116</sup> As with John, Jesus is circumcised and named on the eighth day (2.21; cf. Lev 12.3). Mary is careful to undergo childbirth purification rites, which culminate in the offering of turtledoves or pigeons at the temple (2.22-24; cf. Lev 12). There they present Jesus before the priests, redeeming their firstborn with five shekels of silver (2.22-23, 27; cf. Lev 27.6; Num 18.16), and two ultra-devout Jews behold him as well, speaking words of prophecy and blessing over him (2.25-38). Joseph and Mary observe Jewish feasts, annually celebrating Passover in the Holy City (Luke 2.41). That Jesus is depicted as a child prodigy, capable of engaging with the most learned scholars of Jerusalem, probably implies that he was the beneficiary of education, most likely from his parents and local synagogue.<sup>117</sup> Comparing Luke's account with the Galilean evidence presented above, in many ways, Jesus' upbringing was quintessential of first-century Palestinian Jews.

## 2.3 A Torah-Centred Life and Mission

### 2.3.1 Torah Practise of Jesus

The Synoptic Gospels essentially presuppose the Torah observance of Jesus, most likely because he is Jewish, and, as we have already seen, ancient sources reveal that such was

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<sup>115</sup> S.T. Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1987), 6.

<sup>116</sup> J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke 1-9*, AB 28 (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 421.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Josephus, *Life* 8-9.

normative for first-century Jews. Their central objective, therefore, is not to prove that Jesus kept the fundamentals of Jewish praxis, for such actions would hardly be remarkable.<sup>118</sup> Rather, their chief aim is to present Jesus as an extraordinary Jew, anointed by God, whose exemplary piety and astonishing deeds exceed the norm. Even so, the Gospels are not silent with regard to Jesus' fidelity to the Mosaic Law. In some places his adherence is merely implied, while other passages are more overt. Let us begin with an example of the latter.

The testing of Jesus (Matt 4.1-11//Mark 1.12-13//Luke 4.1-13) appears comparatively dissonant in the Synoptic narratives since it follows a glorious apex of divine commissioning.<sup>119</sup> However, there is much more to the story than mere asceticism, which becomes apparent in light of the Deuteronomic backdrop of the narrative: On three occasions Jesus deflects temptation with a direct quote from the book (Deut 6.13, 16; 8.3). The latter chapter is an admonition to observe 'every commandment' of the Torah (8.1) and relevantly discusses the archetypal wilderness story of Israel, revealing God's purpose behind the event: to 'test' and 'make [them] hunger' in order to see 'whether [they] would keep his commandments or not' (8.2-3, 16). The parallels are obvious—God leads Jesus into the wilderness for forty days of hunger to test his sonship (8.5).

While a noteworthy resemblance to the testing of Jesus is evident in the story of Job, an even stronger parallel exists in the post-biblical Jewish tradition surrounding the *Akedah* story (the 'binding' of Isaac, Gen 22.1-19), in which Satan (or Prince Mastema) appears to entice Abraham.<sup>120</sup> According to the Talmud, Abraham, like Jesus, quotes Scripture to combat his adversary (*b. Sanh.* 89b).<sup>121</sup> By fulfilling Deuteronomy 6-8, Jesus

<sup>118</sup> See L.E. Keck, *Who is Jesus?: History in Perfect Tense* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 31.

<sup>119</sup> While πειράζω can be rendered 'tempt', it is more often translated as 'test' (cf. Matt 16.1; 19.3; 22.18; 22.35; Mark 8.11; 10.2; 12.15; Luke 11.16).

<sup>120</sup> *Jub.* 17.15-16; *Gen. Rab.* 22.6; *b. Sanh.* 89b.

<sup>121</sup> The exact relevance of rabbinic literature to the New Testament remains a disputed subject in scholarship due to the fact that these sources postdate first-century Judaism. There is a large consensus concerning the following: The Mishnah was compiled and edited by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi ca. 200 CE, the Tosefta (a supplement to the Mishnah) is dated from 250-300 CE, the Jerusalem Talmud ca. 400 CE, and the Babylonian Talmud ca. 500 CE. Other important works include commentaries such as the Halakhic Midrashim (200-400 CE) and the Classical Amoraic Midrashim (400-600 CE). See G. Stemmerger, 'Dating Rabbinic Traditions' in R. Bieringer et al. (eds), *The New Testament and Rabbinic Literature*, JSJSup 136 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 79-96. Just because these works are dated post-70 CE does not mean, however, that they do not retain older traditions from the time of Jesus. Young, *Meet the Rabbis*, 107, observes: 'These texts should never be excluded from comparative study with the Gospels because, even if written in 220 C.E., the composite nature of rabbinic literature means that earlier sources were employed from a carefully preserved oral history that was passed down.' Similarly, R. Bauckham, 'The Relevance of Extra-Canonical Jewish Texts to New Testament Study' in J.B. Green (ed.), *Hearing the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 90-108,



re-enacts Israel's history; except, like Abraham, Jesus does not succumb to the failures of his forefathers. According to the Mishnah, the ten generations from Noah to Abraham provoked God continually until Abraham came and received the blessing of obedience, withstanding ten tests (*m. Avot* 5.2-3). Similarly, whereas Israel failed in the wilderness with three strikes—(1) grumbling and not trusting God for daily provision (Exod 16.1-21), (2) committing *avodah zarah* (Num 25.1-3), and (3) testing God at Massah (Exod 17.1-7; Deut 6.16)—Jesus overcomes the same temptations, proving to be righteous and worthy of his anointing. Therefore, the desert narrative sets the stage for all three Synoptic Gospels: Jesus' exemplary obedience to Moses is tried and true.

Since Sabbath observance has always been a principal commandment of Judaism and 'one of the best-known Jewish customs in the ancient world',<sup>122</sup> we would naturally expect some sort of reference to Jesus engaging in this public weekly celebration. The Exodus Decalogue (Exod 20.1-17) decrees that Israel must 'remember the day of the Sabbath, to sanctify it' (v. 8) as a day לַיהוָה ('to/for the Lord'; v. 10). Over the centuries, the charge to preserve its holiness would transcend beyond the prohibition of work and a time for temple offering (Lev 23.2) to become a day dedicated to spiritual matters. As Jewish sources indicate, Judaism would attribute both assembly and Scripture reading to Mosaic legislation regarding proper Sabbath observance (cf. Acts 15.21).<sup>123</sup> We find Jesus participating in both: 'And as was his custom, he went to the *synagogue* on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to *read*' (Luke 4.16; emphasis mine). Thus, according to Luke, Jesus regularly attends synagogue services and engages in corporate worship, implying that he kept the Sabbath on a weekly basis.

Although Dunn recognizes the significance of Luke 4.16, his statement that we can merely 'assume that the adult Jesus observed the Sabbath, [and] attended synagogue' seems

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citing 97, challenges the methodological approach that dismisses the relevance of any Jewish literature not composed before the NT, deeming it 'a spurious kind of purism'. He argues: 'Judaism changes after 70 CE, but not in such a way as to destroy all continuity with its past' (*ibid.*). Furthermore, Bauckham notes that rabbinic parallels with the Gospels can be 'instructive irrespective of date', especially with regard to the exegesis of the OT (*ibid.*).

<sup>122</sup> Trebilco, 'Jewish backgrounds', 363.

<sup>123</sup> Josephus ascribes to Moses, the 'lawgiver', the Sabbath custom of gathering and reading the Torah (*Ag. Ap.* 2.175; cf. *Ant.* 16.43). Philo presents two main objectives of the Sabbath: rest from work and the study of Scripture ('philosophy'), which took place in the synagogue (*Creation* 128; *Dreams* 2.127). Perhaps this tradition is rooted in the fact that the Sabbath is called a מִקְרָא (Lev 23.3) meaning both 'assembly' and 'reading', often referring to Scripture (cf. Neh 8.8). If this is true, then such customs are not as arbitrary as Sander supposes (cf. *Practice and Belief*, 197-98).

far too conservative.<sup>124</sup> From the outset of his public ministry, the Gospels present Jesus actively teaching in synagogues throughout Galilee and Judea (Matt 4.23; Mark 1.21; Luke 4.15, 44). Typical gatherings would be on Sabbath days and this is evident in every recorded instance of Jesus teaching in the synagogue (Mark 6.2; Luke 3.10). Yet, even in this verse, we see that Luke's main objective is not merely to present a good Jew who keeps Sabbath; rather, we see someone dynamically involved in Jewish community life. Indeed, if Jesus had occasionally flouted Sabbath observance, it would hardly be conceivable for him to be given the high honour of reading from holy writ and expounding its meaning for the populace (Luke 4.20) or that a prominent Pharisee would welcome him for a Sabbath meal (Luke 14.1).

In the same way that Jesus engages in Judaism's local institution of public worship—the synagogue—he also participates in the central hub of Jewish devotion—the Temple. As an adult, Jesus continues the practice of making pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover (Matt 26.17-25//Mark 14.12-21//Luke 22.7-13; cf. Deut 16.1-8), and the evidence suggests that he celebrated other Jewish festivals there as well.<sup>125</sup> Luke presents a twelve-year-old Jesus who is drawn to the Temple, where he engages in Torah study (Luke 2.49). Approximately two decades later, during the same festival, Jesus teaches daily in the Temple courts (Luke 19.47; 21.37; cf. Matt 26.55; Mark 14.49). It is possible that Jesus arrives in Jerusalem a week prior to Passover, because he follows the common custom of arriving early to undergo a seven-day purification rite in preparation for the holy occasion (Philo, *Spec. Laws* 1.261; Josephus, *J.W.* 6.290).<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, he pays the temple tax in accordance with Jewish law, albeit in a manner befitting a wonderworker (Matt 17.24-27). Jesus, therefore, affirms the centres of Jewish religion; he does not resemble a Qumran sectarian or a vagrant Cynic. His full participation in mainstream Jewish life is evident by an on-going *aliyah* to the holy hill of Jerusalem.

The Synoptics also mention tassels on Jesus' garment, an outward demarcation of a practising Jew.<sup>127</sup> According to the Torah (Num 15.37-41; Deut 22.12), all male Israelites are required to display twisted threads on the corners of their outer clothing as a visual

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<sup>124</sup> J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 317.

<sup>125</sup> The fourth Gospel records Jesus participating in Sukkot (John 7.1, 37) and Hanukkah (John 10.22-39).

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Sanders, *Judaism*, 113, 134; S. McKnight, *Jesus and His Death: Historiography, the Historical Jesus, and Atonement Theory* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 254.

<sup>127</sup> The word for 'tassel' is *ῥάσπεδον*, which is used in the LXX for *צִיצִית*. See J. Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 27 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 437.

reminder to obey all the commandments. Such tassels are mentioned when the sick touch Jesus' garment for healing (Matt 9.20; 14.36; Mark 6.56; Luke 8.44) and when Jesus censures the ostentatious practice of lengthening them (Matt 23.5).<sup>128</sup> In keeping this custom, we see that Jesus fulfils a Torah precept while simultaneously professing to 'do all of [God's] commandments' (Num 15.40). Such references therefore 'suggest that he himself was a pious Jew who took his religious obligations seriously'.<sup>129</sup>

Torah practice is abundantly evident in the life of Jesus, notwithstanding the collective picture that the Synoptics present, namely, that Jesus is no ordinary Jew. We are not informed whether Jesus fasts on Yom Kippur or on a weekly basis; yet he fasts for forty days. As with typical observance, Jesus prays in the morning (Mark 1.35; Luke 4.42) and evening (Matt 14.23); he also prays for an entire night (Luke 6.12). Jesus pronounces the Hebrew blessing over bread and multiplies loaves for the masses (Matt 14.13-21; 15.29-39; Mark 6.30-44; 8.1-10; Luke 9.10-17). Jesus does not merely keep kosher and abstain from unclean meat; he drowns a herd of swine (Matt 8.32//Mark 5.13//Luke 8.33). Strictly speaking, there is no mention of Jesus practising almsgiving; yet, he traverses the terrain of biblical Israel, healing the afflicted with relentless compassion (Matt 14.14). Taking the above descriptions into consideration, it would appear that Jesus operates within the confinements of Judaism, and the very heartbeat of that faith, the Torah, is manifest in his daily life.

### *2.3.2 Torah and Prophetic Mission*

In the Gospels, Jesus is commonly addressed as διδάσκαλος ('teacher') and ῥαββί/ῥαββουνί ('rabbi'). It is difficult to ascertain which exactly Jesus was called more, for the Gospels reveal that 'teacher' may simply be a translation of 'rabbi'.<sup>130</sup> Technically, rabbi means 'my master', but by the first century this word had become synonymous with 'teacher' (John 20.16). Notwithstanding that it was a loosely given title in Judaism at this time, someone who was publically recognized as a Torah teacher presupposes a lifestyle in conformity to that instruction. Jesus himself recognizes that instructors of Moses were to

<sup>128</sup> Translations like the NIV and NASB are inconsistent in their translation of κράσπεδον, making it appear that only the scribes and Pharisees fulfil the biblical commandment to wear tassels.

<sup>129</sup> Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 317; cf. J. Milgrom, 'Of Hems and Tassels: Rank, Authority and Holiness Were Expressed in Antiquity by Fringes on Garments', *BAR* 9.3 (1983), 61-65.

<sup>130</sup> B.D. Chilton, *Pure Kingdom: Jesus' Vision of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 46, argues that 'rabbi' is 'the title most frequently ascribed to Jesus in the Gospels'.

live under a higher standard of modelling that observance for others (Matt 23.2-3). In typical Jewish fashion, Jesus raises up many disciples—himself, a pious act fulfilling one of three important duties of Judaism (*m. Avot* 1.1).<sup>131</sup> Therefore, an itinerant rabbi teaching in synagogues and dining with Pharisees who was not diligently committed to Torah living is hardly credible.<sup>132</sup>

Jesus' interaction with his contemporaries implies a mutual adherence to Scripture. Such is evident even in the questions Jesus asks: 'What is written in the Law? How do you read it?' (Luke 10.26), 'Have you not read in the book of Moses . . .?' (Mark 12.26; cf. Matt 12.5; 22.31), 'What did Moses command you?' (Mark 10.3), and 'is it lawful . . .?' (Matt 12.10; Mark 3.4; Luke 6.9; 14.3). Thus, Jesus presupposes the Torah to be authoritative and the nature of such discussion implies that both Jesus and his interlocutors appeal to Scripture as the primary foundation for argumentation (cf. Matt 19.3; Mark 10.2). Furthermore, numerous times Jesus rebukes his opponents for their impartiality to the Torah, due to hypocrisy or traditions that impede the written decree (Matt 5.20; 6.1-18; 15.3-9; 23.1-4; Mark 7.6-13; Luke 12.1; 11.46). As Fredriksen articulates so well,

The Gospels frequently depict Jesus arguing with his contemporaries (often scribes and Pharisees) about the correct understanding of "the Law and the prophets." He has one opinion, his opponents another; but all stand within the framework of the idea of Israel, and all presume the importance and sanctification of the Law. Argument implies participation.<sup>133</sup>

Jesus' characteristic use of the *meshal* (משל), the Hebrew parable and proverb, reflects a common rabbinical technique. One-third of the Synoptic sayings of Jesus are parables, and their content and theme resemble many stories recorded by the sages and rabbis.<sup>134</sup> A.M. Hunter is probably correct in asserting that it was the synagogue that shaped Jesus' *haggadic* teaching.<sup>135</sup> According to Young, Jesus' preference for open-air preaching

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<sup>131</sup> Deuteronomy speaks of teaching the Torah 'diligently to your sons' (6.7; translation mine), but this obligation was also applied to the training of disciples, since 'son' and 'disciple' were used interchangeably (cf. Luke 11.19).

<sup>132</sup> Strict Pharisees would not invite a non-observant Jew into table fellowship. Luke records three separate occasions where Jesus dines with Pharisees (7.36; 11.37; 14.1).

<sup>133</sup> P. Fredriksen, 'Did Jesus Oppose the Purity Laws?', *Bible Review* 95.2 (1995), 20-25, 42-47, citing 23.

<sup>134</sup> B.H. Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 7.

<sup>135</sup> A.M. Hunter, *Interpreting the Parables* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 8; contra J. Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus* (tr. S.H. Hooke; London: SCM, 1972), 12, who ascribes the origin of Jewish parables to Jesus himself.

reflected another common setting for learning at this time.<sup>136</sup> Even his introductory question, ‘To what may the matter be compared?’, is identical to the way other rabbis began their parables.<sup>137</sup> Parables served to ‘illuminate and clarify the meaning of the sacred text’ and help the common people grasp the deeper principles and intricacies of the Torah.<sup>138</sup> The use of parables, albeit to a much lesser degree, can also be observed in the ministries of Isaiah (Isa 5.1-6; 28.24-28) and Nathan (2 Sam 12.1-4)—which leads to our next point.

Despite the aforementioned, on the whole, Jesus’ ministry does not resemble other close contemporary rabbis, such as Hillel or Shammai. Undoubtedly, various parallels may be noted, especially concerning matters of *halakha*, and it is possible that such eminent scholars influenced Jesus to some degree.<sup>139</sup> Nevertheless, we are told that the people were ‘astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes’ (Mark 1.22; cf. Matt 7.29). His role and ministry more accurately echoes the earlier hero of Israel’s past: the miracle prophet. This does not diminish the fact that Jesus was commonly called rabbi, for these were not mutually exclusive terms.<sup>140</sup>

It is of utmost importance to recognize Jesus’ prophetic mission before assessing his attitude toward the Law. If his fidelity to the Torah is strictly judged by his resemblance to Hillel or Shammai, or any other Pharisee for that matter, Jesus will certainly appear like a ‘sore theological thumb’.<sup>141</sup> However, we are not justified in juxtaposing the scribe and the prophet when they have different roles. We cannot compare an Elijah to an Ezra. They play different parts in Israel’s drama, though they follow the same script, the Torah.<sup>142</sup> Although there exists a consensus in scholarship to recognize this mantle upon Jesus, we shall see that there remains an inconsistent and unjustified tendency to remove Jesus from Judaism because he does not always resemble his Pharisaic contemporaries.

The Hebrew prophets were the original rabbis of antiquity who trained disciples, known as the ‘sons of the prophets’.<sup>143</sup> In many ways, Elijah and Elisha formed the archetypal, mentor-student relationship. Elisha counts the cost and abandons everything to

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<sup>136</sup> Young, *Parables*, 34-35.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. *b. Sotah* 40b.

<sup>138</sup> Young, *Parables*, 12.

<sup>139</sup> For example, Jesus’ statement in Matt 22.40 resembles Hillel’s teaching in *b. Shab.* 3b.

<sup>140</sup> B.D. Chilton, ‘Mapping a Place for Jesus’ in *Missing Jesus*, 41-44, citing 43.

<sup>141</sup> Meier, *Law and Love*, 414.

<sup>142</sup> Jesus affirms the validity of the scribe’s role in Matt 13.52.

<sup>143</sup> 2 Kgs 2.3, 5, 7, 15, 22; 4.1, 38; 6.1; 9.1.

follow and serve his master (1 Kgs 19.21). When Elijah ascends to heaven (2 Kgs 2.12), Targum Jonathan changes Elisha's cry from 'my father, my father' to 'my rabbi, my rabbi'. In addition, these men of mystery are renowned for performing some of the greatest miracles in Israel's history. They control the elements, work feats of supernatural provision, cleanse the leper, and raise the dead—something that even Moses did not perform.

In a similar way, when the people marvel concerning Jesus, 'A great prophet has arisen among us!' (Luke 7.16), they place his ministry on par with such wonderworkers from the northern kingdom. His public persona cannot therefore be adequately classified as a wandering sage or a rabbi with prophetic flair. Commonly known as 'the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee (Matt 21.11), the crowds speculate whether he might be 'one of the prophets of old' like Elijah or Jeremiah (Mark 6.15//Luke 9.8; cf. Matt 16.14). This is exactly the manner in which the Gospels memorialize him.

We have already seen how Luke parallels the narrative of Jesus' birth and childhood with the story of the prophet Samuel, but the allusions to Elijah and Elisha are far greater. Vermes is correct in asserting that Jesus' ministry mirrors the legacy of these prophets, even though his works notably surpass them.<sup>144</sup> Like Elijah's rain miracle, Jesus also demonstrates his authority over nature, calming the storm and walking upon water. Elisha cleanses the leper (2 Kgs. 5.14); Jesus heals ten lepers in one setting (Luke 17.11-19). Elisha satisfies a hundred men with twenty loaves and with some left over (2 Kgs. 4.43); Jesus performs this miracle twice, only with thousands. Both Elijah and Jesus ascend to heaven, and many have noted the verbal parallels between the story of Jesus raising a widow's son to life (Luke 7.11-17) and that of Elijah resurrecting the Sidonite widow's son (1 Kgs 17.22).

Jesus' emphasis on forsaking family and property for the sake of discipleship is another prime example. When Jesus calls his followers, they quickly abandon their fishing boats like Elisha does his plough and oxen. The request of one disciple to say farewell to his family (Luke 9.61) is reminiscent of Elisha's request to kiss his parents goodbye (1 Kgs 19.20). When Jesus' teaching concerning the precedence of ministry over parental obligations (e.g., Luke 9.60; 14.26;) is contextualized with this backdrop, his difficult teachings make much more sense.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Vermes, *Religion of Jesus*, 4.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary*, 58.

The question of Jesus' own self-awareness is a matter of debate within scholarship, and we will not present a detailed argument here. However, a few observations on the matter are very relevant concerning Jesus' role and ministry. First, in corroboration with the aforementioned, it is significant that Jesus compares his own ministry with that of Elijah and Elisha (Luke 4.27) and views himself as a prophet (Mark 6.4; Luke 13.33). Second, since Jesus recognizes John the Baptist, his forerunner, as 'more than a prophet' (Matt 11.9; cf. Mark 11.32), this implies that his own role is even greater. Third, in the parable of the vineyard tenants (Matt 21.33-46//Mark 12.1-12//Luke 20.9-18), Jesus refers to the prophets as 'servants' (cf. 2 Kgs. 17.22; Jer 7.25), while giving himself superior status as 'the son' and the apex of prophetic history.<sup>146</sup> Fourth, when John's disciples ask Jesus if he is indeed the coming one, Jesus' affirmative response parallels messianic expectations recorded in the 'Messianic Apocalypse' (4Q521; cf. Matt 11.4-5//Luke 7.22-23).

In view of the above, Jesus clearly perceived his role and ministry in preeminent ways and his messianic claim cannot be so easily dismissed as an embellishment of the Gospels. Even so, his identity as messiah is not incompatible with the prophetic mantle (Matt 26.68). David was also considered a prophet who 'spoke in the Holy Spirit' (Mark 12.36). This self-perception would explain his assumed authority with regards to teaching (Mark 1.22), forgiving sin on heaven's behalf (Mark 2.25), and subjugating the spiritual forces of evil (Luke 4.36). To add further complexity, it is critical to note that Jesus never claimed to fulfil all messianic prophecy; at the very least, Jesus considered himself a prophet and that appears to be his distinctive reputation among the masses. Perhaps the best summation of his identity that reflected popular opinion is found at the conclusion of Luke: 'Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people' (24.19).

So how does the Torah relate to Jesus' prophetic mission? To answer that question, we must first understand the call and characteristics of a prophet. Deuteronomy reveals that the purpose of the prophet is to communicate the words of God to the people, who are in turn obligated to listen, i.e., obey them (Deut 18.18, 19). The main qualifications for a true prophet are as follows: (1) their predictions must come to pass (18.22), and (2) they must not seduce Israel away from the commandments of God (13.5). Prophets were known for their oracles, prophetic signs, parables, miracles, woes, and a courageous reproach of kings

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<sup>146</sup> Following this parable Jesus also calls himself the Davidic 'chief cornerstone', quoting Ps 118.22 (Luke 20.17).

and priests. These defining traits served one overarching goal: restoring Israel to her covenantal obligations. Taking heed of the prophet, therefore, was synonymous with listening to God and the decrees God had previously given Israel through Moses (2 Kgs 17.13; Jer 26.4-5). When Jesus' reputation as prophet is understood in this context, the Torah takes on added significance; for the objective of bringing Israel back to the commandments becomes paramount to his mission.

While the prophetic call of repentance is, no doubt, evident in Jesus' ministry, scholars disagree over what exactly Jesus meant by 'repent'. In Judaism, the concept of repentance is known as תשובה ('teshuvah'), from the root שׁוּב ('turn, return'), and refers to the turning from sin toward righteous living prescribed by the Torah (Isa 31.6; Jer 35.15; Hos 14.1). Many scholars recognise this concept as underlying the Greek words used in the Gospels. Wright, however, perceives Jesus' message in purely political terms—a 'renunciation of nationalist violence'—rather than continuing the moral reform of John the Baptist.<sup>147</sup> His position is largely shaped by a passage from Josephus' military memoirs where Josephus recounts how he rebukes a resistance fighter named Jesus for conspiring against him and then releases the man on the condition that 'he would show repentance and prove his loyalty to [Josephus]' (*Life* 110 [Thackeray, LCL]). Because Josephus combines two relevant themes of repentance and trust or loyalty, Wright justifies superimposing a political context of military resistance onto the Synoptic narratives. This approach seems artificial and too restrictive. Josephus is clearly challenging the fighter to turn from his scheming ways and show allegiance to *him*, not God. Dunn identifies a more fitting context, positing instead that 'the Baptist and Jesus were in effect calling for a "return to the Lord", in echo of a constant refrain in their Scriptures, particularly the prophets', and thus 'from a life in breach of God's commandments'.<sup>148</sup>

In the same way that prophets were given the definitive task of turning wayward Israel back to Torah observance, they also elucidated the commandments and what God required of the people. They did not merely tell the people to repent; they showed them *how*: 'But you must return [שׁוּב] to your God; maintain *mercy and justice*, and wait for your God always' (Hos 12.6; emphasis mine). The prophets collectively underscored weightier matters of the Torah, such as the Decalogue, that were being neglected by the people, and warned them that such transgressions would lead to exile. They spoke out against idolatry,

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<sup>147</sup> Wright, *Jesus*, 251.

<sup>148</sup> Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 499.



bloodshed, adultery, theft, disregard for the Temple, Sabbath breaking, and injustice.<sup>149</sup> Yet, Isaiah discouraged Temple sacrifice and festivals, including the Sabbath, as a means to appease God ritually without living in wholehearted obedience (Isa 1.10-20; 66.1-3). According to Micah, it was not endless sacrifice that God was truly after; the summation of what God desired was right living toward people and a humble walk with God (Mic 6.8).

Despite the prophet's divinely commissioned role, the Scriptures reveal a pattern that the people, along with their leaders, refused to heed their warning and instruction (2 Chr 24.19; Jer 25.4). Jeremiah clashes with the ruling priesthood and, along with many other voices, rebukes the self-centred shepherds of Israel.<sup>150</sup> Even so, the prophets predict a time of renewal, a day when Israel would return to God and walk in Torah faithfulness (Ezek 36.27; Jer 31.33-34). God's Torah would eventually go forth from Mount Zion and nations would be drawn to its light.<sup>151</sup> As Banks and Svartvik demonstrate, there is no compelling evidence from either the OT or early Jewish sources that the Torah would eventually be replaced or abrogated;<sup>152</sup> what we find is the opposite, and the renewal would begin with Israel. This expectation is also evident in the final charge given to the people through Malachi: 'Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel' (Mal 4.4). The following verse (v. 5) states that God would send Israel the prophet Elijah in order to 'turn' hearts and restore the nation before the final judgement. It is therefore highly relevant and quite remarkable, that Jesus attributes this eschatological role to John the Baptist (Matt 11.14). As we will see from Jesus' teaching, his ministry continues the work of his predecessor.

## 2.4 A Torah-Centred Message

### 2.4.1 Prophetic Teshuvah in Continuum

The restorative movement of John the Baptist was a Jewish revival centred on prophetic *teshuvah*. A large majority of Jews believed that John was a prophet (Mark 11.32), and the description of his hairy clothing is another indication of this role (Mark 1.6; Matt 3.4; cf.

<sup>149</sup> Isa 1.15, 17; 58.13; 59.3; Jer 7.9; 17.21, 22; 29.23; Ezek 23.37-39, 45; Hos 4.2.

<sup>150</sup> Jer 2.8; 23.1-2; 25.34-36; 50.6. Cf. Isa 56.10, 11; Lam 4.13, 14; Ezek 34.1-10; Hos 5.1; Zeph 3.3-4; Zech 10.3.

<sup>151</sup> Isa 1.1-3; 56.6-7; 51.4; 60.3; Jer 3.17; Mic 4.2; Hab 2.14.

<sup>152</sup> Banks, *Law*, 15-85; J. Svartvik, *Mark and Mission: Mk 7:1-23 in its Narrative and Historical Contexts*, ConBNT 32 (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 2000), 350-53.

Zech 13.4). John's core message, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Matt 3.2), is identical to the subsequent proclamation of Jesus (Matt 4.17). This is hardly coincidental, for Matthew is presenting the ministry of Jesus in continuum with the *teshuvah* movement of John.<sup>153</sup> Both stress the urgency for repentance in light of the dawning 'kingdom of heaven' (cf. *m. Ber.* 2:2) and 'good news' (Mark 1.15; Luke 3.15-18), referring to the Isaianic pronouncement of God's victorious reign in Zion (Isa 52.7; cf. 40.9-10). When we analyse how John prepared the people for the messiah's arrival and the great judgement, we see that he was raising the standard of Torah observance, turning the disobedient back to God and his path of righteousness (Luke 1.16-17). Considering this, there is no reason to assume that Jesus abandoned key elements of the Law in light of this proclamation. Embracing the kingdom of heaven required a greater allegiance to the Torah's pillars, not a jettisoning of them.

This becomes apparent when the ministry of Jesus is contextualized in the tradition of Hebrew prophet. Jesus' predictions, parables, woes and judgements all reflect typical prophetic *teshuvah*. He denounces towns that witnessed his many miracles for refusing to repent (Matt 11.20). His cry against them, 'Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!', echoes the judgements of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, and Zephaniah.<sup>154</sup> The offensive juxtaposition of Galilean towns and wicked Gentile cities, most notably Sodom, is reminiscent of prophetic laments against the people of Jerusalem.<sup>155</sup> In a similar way, Jesus shames his generation for refusing to repent as the Ninevites had done through Jonah's mission, and prophesies their impending doom (Matt 12.41; Luke 11.32; cf. Jer 7.29). When Jesus is informed of Pilate's atrocity against the Jews, he responds with a hard-line message: 'unless you repent, you will all likewise perish' (Luke 13.5). Isaiah shouts, 'Ariel, Ariel!' (29.1), Jesus mourns, 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem!' (Matt 23.37; Luke 13.34). In typical prophetic fashion, he declares the desolation of the holy Temple (Luke 13.35) and weeps over the city as Jeremiah before him (Luke 19.41; Jer 9.1; 13.17).

A similar pattern is evident in Jesus' impassioned rebuke of those shepherding Israel—the king (Luke 13.32), priest (Luke 20.19), and teacher of the Law (Matt 23.1-36). Jesus' derogatory portrayal of Pharisees as defiled whitewashed tombs (Matt 23.27; Luke 11.44) or as blind guides that a blind people follow after (Matt 15.14; 23.16, 24) is

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<sup>153</sup> That is not to say that they were identical. John, for example, lived under the strict ascetic practise of a Nazirite, whereas Jesus drank alcohol (Matt 11.18-19).

<sup>154</sup> Matt 11.20-24; Luke 10.13-16. Cf. Isa 3.9; 29.1; Jer 13.27; Ezek 16.23; 24.6, 9; Amos 6.1; Zeph 3.2.

<sup>155</sup> Matt 10.15; 11.21-24; Luke 10.12. Cf. Jer 23.14; Lam 4.6; Ezek 16.48.

strikingly similar to Jeremiah's criticism of priests and prophets.<sup>156</sup> 'Woe to the shepherds of Israel!' says the prophet Ezekiel (34.2); 'Woe to you scribes and Pharisees!' cries Jesus (Matt 23.13). As severe as these words may be, Jesus was not alone in his use of harsh words against other religious leaders; again, we find parallel in John's censure of Herod's unlawful marriage (Luke 3.19) and his denunciation of Pharisees as a 'viper's brood' (Matt 3.7; cf. 23.33). Such criticism, whether from John or Jesus, should be contextualized as an in-house rebuke and not a wholesale condemnation of all within Pharisaism. As noted above, Jesus dines with Pharisees on numerous occasions and recognizes the role of the scribe in kingdom work (Matt 13.52; 23.34). Neither should we equate Jesus' charge against a corrupt *Cohanim* with a disdain for all priests and Levites. Rather, Jesus' opposition to the shepherds of Israel is rooted in a prophetic zeal for righteousness and restoration, and their corruption was incongruous with the higher standard to which they were called.

In contrast to his prophetic woes and judgements, Jesus' ministry and teaching was marked by a sincere compassion for the masses that wandered 'like sheep without a shepherd', that is, they lacked true spiritual leadership.<sup>157</sup> Since the ultimate purpose behind *teshuvah* is not condemnation, but renewal, it becomes clear why he travels throughout the land, calling the 'lost sheep of Israel' back to right relationship with God and his Torah (Matt 10.6; 15.24). Therefore, Jesus' aim was not to call righteous people (those keeping the Torah), 'but sinners to repentance' (Luke 5.32), returning wayward sheep back into the fold, thus fulfilling the model Davidic shepherd Ezekiel envisions, who seeks the lost and binds up the injured (Ezek 34.16, 23). Although Jesus received criticism for his occasional fellowship with sinners (Mark 2.13-17), his actions are no more radical than that of John the Baptist who associated with 'tax collectors and prostitutes' (Matt 21.32), restoring them to covenant fidelity.

Despite the overtly prophetic content of his message, Sanders considers it 'a fact that a call to all Israel to repent did not figure prominently in Jesus' message'.<sup>158</sup> This drastic revision of Jesus' message has not gone without criticism.<sup>159</sup> While Sanders is correct that the general subject of repentance is ordinary to Jewish literature, the sayings of

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<sup>156</sup> Lam 4.13-17; cf. Isa 9.16; Hos 6.9.

<sup>157</sup> Matt 9.36; Mark 6.34; cf. Ezek 34.5; Zech 10.2.

<sup>158</sup> Sanders, *Jesus*, 113.

<sup>159</sup> B.D. Chilton, 'Jesus and the Repentance of E. P. Sanders', *TynBul* 39 (1988), 1-18; D.C. Allison, Jr., 'Jesus and the Covenant: A Response to E. P. Sanders', *JSNT* 29 (1987), 57-78.

the rabbis do not bear the same prophetic timbre evident in the Gospels. Sanders does not adequately address how or why a ministry like Jesus' could be birthed out of a renewal movement centred on national repentance (John the Baptist), not continue that same emphasis, and yet start another movement that does continue that emphasis, and on a larger scale. As the Gospels make clear, Jesus travels all over Israel proclaiming a message of repentance (Matt 4.17; Mark 1.15), and commissions his disciples to publically announce the same message throughout both Israel (Mark 6.12) and the world (Matt 28.19; Luke 24.47). Jesus does not attenuate John's accent on repentance, but broadens its boundaries to incorporate the nations in eschatological fulfilment.

*Teshuvah* is also evident in Jesus' teaching concerning *how* Israel must repent. Jesus, like the prophets, gives precedence to principal matters of God's instruction, such as the Decalogue, which he often links to Leviticus 19 of the Holiness Code (e.g., Matt 19.18-19; cf. *Lev. Rab.* 24.5), and warns against grave transgressions that warrant divine retribution, both on a national level (i.e., invasion, slavery, and exile) and an individual level pertaining to the afterlife (i.e., *Gehenna*). Since the OT Scriptures reiterate and stress the importance of justice and mercy toward others, along with humble obedience to God, it is no surprise that Jesus continues the same prophetic emphasis. Of course, accentuating such qualities does not make one a prophet; rabbinic sources also give credence to the superiority of these matters over other commandments deemed more ritual or ceremonial in nature. However, in regard to Jesus' prophetic status, it clarifies why the scope of his instruction is characteristically devoted to these ethical matters.

This is most visible in Jesus' discourse against the Pharisees. In Luke 11.42, Jesus scolds them for their complete neglect of 'justice and the love of God' (cf. Mic 6.8; Hos 12.6; Zech 7.9) in an unhealthy preoccupation with the minutiae (the tithing of spices). While he actually affirms the latter rabbinic *halakha* of tithing spices,<sup>160</sup> Jesus employs typical rabbinic hyperbole to shame them for sidestepping 'the weightier matters of the law' (Matt 23.23). The Pharisees have their priorities upside-down; they exert their energy straining out gnats, yet ironically swallow camels (Matt 23.24). Jesus juxtaposes 'the important and the trifling' in order to shame them for not being Torah observant enough.<sup>161</sup> In Matthew's version, Jesus lists the weightier commandments as 'justice, mercy, and faith'

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<sup>160</sup> J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke 10-24*, AB 28A (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 945: 'Jesus does not do away with tithing, but says rather, "First things first."' Cf. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 164.

<sup>161</sup> Lachs, *Rabbinic Commentary*, 370.

(23.23). However, the meaning is essentially the same. ‘Justice and mercy’, or simply ‘justice’, describes humankind’s right horizontal relationship with his neighbour. ‘Love of God’, or ‘faith’, describes humankind’s right vertical relationship with God. This faith (πίστις) is ‘directed primarily to *God* in covenant loyalty to God’s will in the law and the prophets’.<sup>162</sup> This two-fold approach to the Scriptures is also evident in Josephus’ description of John the Baptist as one who ‘exhorted the people to live righteous lives, *to practice justice towards their fellows and piety towards God*’ (*Ant.* 18.117 [Thackeray, LCL]).<sup>163</sup>

Jesus also encapsulates the commandments in terms of loving God and neighbour (Mark 12.28-34); everything in the Law and Prophets hangs upon these two (Matt 22.40). Employing a common Jewish hermeneutic, Jesus dovetails two phrases that begin with the same word, ואהבת, ‘And you shall love’ —one from Deuteronomy 6.5 (part of the daily-recited *Shema*) and the other from Leviticus 19.18 (concerning one’s neighbour). The evidence suggests that Jesus was not alone in this summation of the Law (Luke 10.25-28; *T. Iss.* 5.2; cf. *T. Naph.* 8.7, 9). This perspective is also shared by Philo, who perceives the two Decalogue tablets as representative of the obligations towards God and neighbour (*Decalogue* 19-20, 121) and praises the holistic virtue of those who are both ‘lovers of God’ and ‘lovers of men’ (*Decalogue* 110 [Colson, LCL]). It is quite probable, therefore, that by grouping the commandments under these two headings, Jesus is also ‘summarizing and so endorsing the Decalogue’.<sup>164</sup> As with many Jews, his high regard for these covenantal statements inscribed by the very ‘finger of God’ (Exod 31.18; Deut 9.10) reflects the preeminent status they are given in Scripture. In Deuteronomy, the liturgical *Shema* (6.4-9) follows the Decalogue, and according to rabbinic sources, both were recited daily in first-century Judaism.<sup>165</sup>

The most notable example of Jesus’ emphasis on essential commandments is found within the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7; hereafter SOM), which according to Allison, ‘function as an elaboration of Jesus’ call for Israel to repent’, as

<sup>162</sup> F.D. Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*, Vol. 2, *The Churchbook: Matthew 13-28* (2nd and rev. edn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 448.

<sup>163</sup> Emphasis mine; cf. Luke 3.10-14.

<sup>164</sup> Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 160.

<sup>165</sup> *m. Tam.* 5.1; *b. Ber.* 12a. See Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 157-58. Vermes, *Religion of Jesus*, 38. Early *tefillin* discovered at Qumran and the Nash papyrus also corroborate their close affiliation.

recorded in 4.17.<sup>166</sup> In the core of the discourse (5.21-48), Jesus discusses Decalogue prohibitions including murder (vv. 21-26), adultery (vv. 27-32), and coveting (v. 28), and again interweaves them with Leviticus 19 of the Holiness Code, highlighting *mitzvot* concerning swearing falsely (vv. 33-37), retaliation (vv. 38-42), and neighbour-love (vv. 43-48).<sup>167</sup> Following this section, Jesus exhorts his followers concerning three acts of righteousness: almsgiving (6.2-4), prayer (6.5-15), and fasting (6.16-18). This list is remarkably similar to the three things mentioned in *Kohelet Rabbah* 5.6 that thwart divine wrath. Lachs has noted that Rabbi Eleazar's grouping of 'prayer, charity, and repentance' is identical to Jesus' teaching here, as fasting and repentance are often used interchangeably or grouped together (1 Kgs 21.27; Joel 2.12; Jonah 3.5).<sup>168</sup> Whether or not Jesus elaborates on these three practises with repentance in view is difficult to prove conclusively. On the other hand, the fact that these were normative duties of Jewish piety (Tob 12.6; Sir 7.10) only confirms that Jesus is once again reaffirming fundamental Torah observance and thus the path of true repentance.

#### 2.4.2 Fulfilling Torah

Considering the large collection of Jesus' teaching found in the Gospels, Matthew 5.17-20 contains without question Jesus' most forthright declarations concerning his view of the Torah. Since this section introduces the main body of the SOM (5.21-7.12), an accurate interpretation is absolutely critical in contextualizing both his teaching and his overall message. Scholarly opinions on this passage vary widely. Sanders and Meier dismiss these verses as the inauthentic and attribute their origin to a later Matthean community—a more conservative branch of nascent Christianity in conflict with the Gentile-oriented Gospel of Mark and the apostle Paul.<sup>169</sup> Jesus, after all, may not have intentionally opposed the Law, but he was not a scrupulous Pharisee-like observer either.<sup>170</sup> Whether these words originate in the mouth of the historical Jesus or if they simply represent Jesus' unofficial opinion requires separate treatment. However, it is noteworthy that the same formula, מִן

<sup>166</sup> D.C. Allison, Jr., *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, Companions to the New Testament (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 9.

<sup>167</sup> See §2.4.3.

<sup>168</sup> Lachs, *Rabbinic Commentary*, 112, 114 n. 1.

<sup>169</sup> Sanders, *Jesus*, 261; Meier scolds uncritical scholars with the 'naïve tendency' of appealing to Matt 5.17-48, 'a creation of Matthew or his church', as a solution to the enigma of Jesus and the Torah. See *Law and Life*, 41-42. Contra T.W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, 153-54; D. Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988), 494.

<sup>170</sup> See Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 176.

νομίσητε ὅτι ἦλθον . . . οὐκ ἦλθον . . . ἀλλὰ . . . ('Do not think that I came to . . . I came not to . . . but to . . .'), appears in Matthew 10.34. Other popular opinions assert that Jesus fulfilled the Law, thereby abolishing its various regulations, while others limit Jesus' scope of Torah to its moral requirements that he affirms in subsequent teaching.

If there is something that Matthew wants to underscore in 5.17, it is that Jesus' primary intention is to 'fulfil' the divine Law. The placement of this logion after the introductory blessings (5.2-12) and before his instruction indicates its importance. 'Do not even let the thought enter your mind that I came to annul the Torah', essentially says Jesus. But why does Jesus repeat καταλῦσαι ('abolish') in 5.17? Since the Beatitudes reveal that his community was already experiencing a level of persecution (5.10-12), perhaps the purpose of this emphatic statement was to dispel spurious rumours already circulating against him (which later resurface in his unjust trial before the Sanhedrin). In addition, it may serve as a caveat to preface and qualify his antithetical statements that follow in vv. 21-48 and his overall challenge to certain Pharisaic and scribal teaching. Ironically, 5.17 has often been interpreted to support the idea that Jesus did in fact annul the Law, but only after fulfilling it, turning Jesus' statement on its head. Matthew's frequent use of 'fulfil' (πληρόω) in his narrative in relation to the scriptural predictions coming to pass has often been used to buttress this argument.<sup>171</sup> Thus, it is understood that the Torah *pointed forward* to Jesus, who eschatologically carried the Law to completion as its fulfiller and *telos* (Rom 10.4).<sup>172</sup> As prevalent as this view may be, it poses numerous difficulties. First, Matthew does not always employ πληρόω strictly in terms of fulfilling prophecy. When Jesus encounters John at the Jordan River, he himself undergoes baptism in order to 'fulfil all righteousness' (3.15), that is, 'carry out' or 'obey' the will of God.<sup>173</sup>

Second, πληρόω in 5.17 does not precede a scriptural reference, nor does it appear in isolation, but is juxtaposed with 'abolish'. As Betz has pointed out, 'both terms are complementary and interpret each other'.<sup>174</sup> Failure to fulfil a messianic prophecy could hardly be classified in terms of 'abolishment'. Rather, the combination of these words form common legal language, in both Greek and Hebrew.<sup>175</sup> For example, καταλύω appears in

<sup>171</sup> Matt 1.22; 2.15, 17, 23; 4.14; 8.17; 12.17; 13.35; 21.4; 26.54, 56; 27.9.

<sup>172</sup> See Banks, *Law*, 207-10; W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, Jr., *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew: Vol. 1, Introduction and Commentary on Matthew 1-7*, ICC (2nd edn; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 486-87.

<sup>173</sup> Evans, *Matthew*, 115.

<sup>174</sup> H.D. Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 178.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 177-79.

early Jewish sources when referring to an impious annulment of the Torah in general, a specific commandment (e.g., the Sabbath), or related *halakha* by ungodly or Gentile rulers.<sup>176</sup> The antonym πληρῶ is used in conjunction to faithfully observing the Torah and its commandments (Rom 8.4; 13.8; Gal 5.14; *T. Naph.* 8.7; cf. *2 Bar.* 57.2). The rabbis likewise employ corresponding Hebrew terminology when speaking of accurately performing the Torah's requirements or neglecting them, either through wilful disobedience or improper custom. This is evident in the Mishnah: 'Rabbi Yonatan says, "Whoever fulfils (קים) the Torah in poverty will ultimately fulfil it in wealth. And whoever abolishes (בטל) the Torah in wealth will ultimately abolish it in poverty"' (*m. Avot* 4.9).<sup>177</sup> Rabbinic literature also applies these terms in relation to proper and improper interpretation of Torah (*t. Sanh.* 14.13; *Mek. Beshallah* 6).<sup>178</sup>

Third, not only must 'abolish' and 'fulfil' be interpreted together, but they also have semantically related counterparts in v. 19. The word καταλῦσαι ('abolish') corresponds to λύση ('dismiss' or 'annul'), while πληρῶσαι ('fulfil') relates to ποιήση ('practise'). Similarly, τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφῆτας ('the Law or the Prophets') in v. 17 accords with both νόμου ('law') in v. 18, and ἐντολῶν ('commandments') in v. 19. Thus, it is evident that the requirements of Scripture are in view, not prophecy. In Second-Temple Judaism, the expression 'the Law and the Prophets' was one way of referring to the Hebrew Bible.<sup>179</sup> It has been noted that Matthew bookends the SOM with this phrase in 7.12, forming an *inclusio* with 5.17,<sup>180</sup> There again, Jesus speaks of doing or practising (ποιεῖτε) what God requires.

Fourth, Jesus' use of οὖν ('therefore') in v. 19, naturally refers to the previous statements, binding these verses together as a literary unit (along with v. 20, which serves as a transitional verse to preface Jesus' subsequent antithetical statements). Taking these facts into consideration, whatever Jesus means by abolish and fulfil in v. 17, it is not left

<sup>176</sup> 2 Macc 2.22; 4.11; 4 Macc 5.33; Josephus, *Ant.* 13.408; Philo, *Dreams* 2.123; cf. *T. Levi* 16.2.

<sup>177</sup> Translation mine; cf *m. Sukk.* 2.7.

<sup>178</sup> Bivin, *Difficult Words*, 94, 101 n.1. See also Brad Young, *Jewish Theologian*, 265: 'When one misunderstands the proper meaning of Torah, one may not obey the Lord's will and therefore cancel the law'.

<sup>179</sup> Cf. Matt 7.12; 22.40; 2 Macc 15.9; 4 Macc 18.10. Note that the order in Matt 11.3 is intentionally reversed to emphasize the prophetic aspect of Scripture. A similar phrase 'Moses and the Prophets' was also used (Luke 16.29, 31; 24.27; 1QS; *b. Ta'an.* 17b) as well as the tripartite grouping of Law, Prophets, and Writings or Psalms (Luke 24.44; *b. Ta'an.* 20a). See Betz, *Sermon*, 177. Evans, *Matthew*, 114-15.

<sup>180</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, 484. Allison, *Sermon*, 35; R.H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution* (2nd edn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 78; Loader, *Attitude*, 184; Betz, *Sermon*, 62; D. Liroy, *The Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount*, Vol. 66 (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 94.



ambiguous; Jesus employs common rabbinic terminology and unpacks his statement with what follows. This verse therefore reveals Jesus' aim to uphold the Torah through obedience and proper exegesis.<sup>181</sup>

Jesus then strengthens his claim by utilizing typical rabbinic hyperbole to affirm the enduring nature of the Torah, down to its tiniest letter and mere serif (v. 18). He places the smallest Hebrew consonant, the *yod* (the equivalent of *iota* in Greek),<sup>182</sup> and its *qots* (a minute thorn-like decorative stroke)—in other words, the most insignificant aspect of the Torah—on par with the vastness of heaven and earth. Although Jesus says ‘*until* heaven and earth pass away’, the emphasis here is on the permanence of Torah, rather than its terminus in the age to come.<sup>183</sup> This is evident in the evangelist's use of an emphatic negative οὐ μὴ in reference to the ἰῶτα or κεραία disappearing. As Luz observes, the phrase ‘can either be a popular circumlocution for “never” or limit the validity of the law until the end of the world’.<sup>184</sup> The Psalms and prophetic books also testify to the eternity of God's word (Ps 119.89; 148.6; Isa 40.8), as do early Jewish sources (4 Ezra 9.37; Bar 4.1; 1 Enoch 99.2; *Gen. Rab.* 10.1). Philo expresses a similar sentiment as Jesus does, that as long as the heavens and the universe continue to exist, the Torah will remain secure and unshaken (Philo, *Moses* 2.14). The parallel in Luke 16.17, however, is more emphatic and lacks a temporal clause: Jesus declares that ‘it is easier’ for creation to disappear than a single *qots* of holy writ. Remarkably, Jesus' combined usage of *yod* and *qots*, in the context of the Torah's abolishment, bears perfect resemblance to rabbinic literature. The ancient tale of King Solomon and *Yod* (*Exod. Rab.* 6.1) reveals that both Jesus and the rabbis drew from a common cultural expression. The story presents a tiny letter appealing his case before God because Solomon had abolished (בטל) him from the text of Deut 17.17, thus alerting the prohibition of multiplying wives. God responds, ‘Solomon and a thousand like him may abolish, but I will not let one *qots* from you be abolished!’<sup>185</sup> Thus, humans may tamper with God's decrees, distorting and breaking them as they see fit, but ultimately they

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<sup>181</sup> D. Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (2nd edn; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 60; Flusser, *Origins*, 495; C.S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 177.

<sup>182</sup> See Bivin, *Difficult Words*, 94-95. T.W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 154. Vermes, *Religion of Jesus*, 19-20 n. 11; Keener, *Matthew*, 178.

<sup>183</sup> See Loader, *Attitude*, 169.

<sup>184</sup> U. Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary* (tr. W.C. Linss; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 265.

<sup>185</sup> Translation mine.

will fail. As with Matt 5.18 and Luke 6.17, the Torah's permanence is stressed as a warning against transgressing its contents or misrepresenting them.

Lapide posits that the subsequent parallel phrase in Matthew 5.18, 'until all is accomplished', is the work of redaction to present a 'salvation-history back door' to Jesus' bold affirmation of the Torah, thus suiting Gentile Christianity's desire to locate the Law's termination in the death and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>186</sup> This is simply conjecture. While some scholars such as Garlington hold a similar interpretation, such a hermeneutical leap 'violates the whole thrust of the passage'.<sup>187</sup> The logion that everything will be 'accomplished' (γίνομαι) resembles 6.10 of the Lord's Prayer: 'Your kingdom come, your will be done (γίνομαι), on earth as it is in heaven', but it may equally apply to the eschatological consummation of all things (cf. Matt 24.34).<sup>188</sup> However, the content of Jesus' statement here greatly resembles a verse from Isaiah: 'so shall my word be, whatever shall proceed out of my mouth, it shall by no means turn back, until all the things which I willed shall have been accomplished' (55.11a LXX). Here we find the double negative (οὐ μὴ) and the same words for 'until' (ἕως ἄν), along with synonymous expressions (returning [void] = passing away) and related words (ῥῆμα = ἰῶτα, κεραία; συντελέω = γίνομαι). Thus, according to Jesus, the Torah is the effective will of God, and his ministry aligns with its fulfilment on earth.

Having affirmed the continuing validity of Mosaic regulation, Jesus concludes by unfolding the implications of this truth (v. 19): the Law is to be wholly obeyed and taught accurately. Again, Jesus employs hyperbole, parallelism, and rabbinic legal language. Anyone who would dare break (λύω) the 'least' of the Torah's *mitzvot* and teach others to do accordingly will be regarded as 'least' in the kingdom, whereas the one who rightly practises (ποιέω) and teaches others to do so will be called 'great'. Similarly, the Rabbis distinguished between the 'light commandment' (מצוה קלה) and the 'weighty

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<sup>186</sup> P. Lapide, *The Sermon on the Mount: Utopia or Program for Action?* (tr. A. Swidler; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 18; cf. Vermes, *Religion of Jesus*, 19-20. Since this phrase 'until all is accomplished' parallels 'until heaven and earth pass away', some scholars attempt to circumvent this difficulty by boldly asserting that the cross and resurrection mean that 'heaven and earth have passed away' (D. Garlington, 'The "Better Righteousness": Matthew 5:20', *BBR* 20.4 [2010], 479-502, citing 482).

<sup>187</sup> Keener, *Matthew*, 178.

<sup>188</sup> See Betz, *Sermon*, 184: 'the Torah will not simply pass out of existence but will be replaced by salvation itself, which after all, is its content'. Cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, 494-95. Either way, the implication is the same: until history comes to a close, the Torah remains in full force.

commandment' (מצוה חמורה; cf. Matt 23.23),<sup>189</sup> sometimes laying emphasis on fulfilling the minor obligation in order to foster wholehearted devotion (*m. Avot* 2.1).

Notwithstanding the fact that Jesus' instruction underscores the weightier matters of the Law, it should not be overlooked that he also discourages partial obedience. As Matthew 23.23 indicates, Jesus affirms the necessity of Torah observance down to the lesser precept, yet his rhetorical play of the 'least' commandment and the 'least' in the kingdom is far more poignant. One will only become 'great' if he or she practises the 'least' of Moses, corresponding perfectly to the *yod* and *qots* of the Torah in the previous verse. Like the book of Deuteronomy, Jesus presents two ways or choices based on one's response to God's instruction revealed in the Law: the path of blessing and the path of condemnation.<sup>190</sup> It is only those 'who do and fulfil the commandments of God' who will be rewarded (*T. Moses* 12.10-11).<sup>191</sup>

Most importantly, in v. 19 the concept of 'fulfilling' the Torah is reinforced and restated: it is practising and teaching, and one's action takes precedence (cf. 7.21). In stating that demotion awaits those who do otherwise, Jesus not only places this obligation upon his followers, but also upon himself as a true messenger of God (5.17; 7.15-20). The relationship between καταλύω (v. 17) and λύω (v. 19) is self-evident, and Greek writers also used λύω in reference to 'breaking the law'.<sup>192</sup> Furthermore, the inclusion of διδάσκω further elaborates on how one may abolish the Torah: through misrepresenting or distorting its contents. The early Christian work heavily influenced by Matthew, the *Didache*, employs καταλύω in the very same way. In 4.13, it cautions the community itself against such impiety: 'You must not forsake the Lord's commandments, but must guard what you have received, *neither adding nor subtracting anything* [i.e., abolishing]'.<sup>193</sup> The document later warns of false teachers who would turn from the truth and propagate ἄλλην διδασχὴν εἰς τὸ καταλύσαι, 'another teaching to the abolishing [of the Lord's instruction]' (11.2a). Contrarily, they are to receive the teacher who increases 'righteousness' (11.2b). This harmonizes perfectly with Matt 5.20, where Jesus uses the word 'righteousness'

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<sup>189</sup> Flusser, *Origins*, 496.

<sup>190</sup> Deut 11.26-32; 28; 30.11-20.

<sup>191</sup> Trans. by R.H. Charles (ed.), *The Assumption of Moses* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1897), 50.

<sup>192</sup> For example, Herodotus speaks of those 'unwilling to break (λύειν) the law' (*Hist.* 6.106.3).

<sup>193</sup> Trans. by M.W. Holmes (ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (2nd edn; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 257; emphasis mine.

(δικαιοσύνη) to speak of *practise* (cf. 5.6, 10; 6.1, 33), thus raising the bar set by scribes and Pharisees for his community and the crowds.

In summary, Matt 5.17-20 represents a glowing affirmation of the Torah by Jesus, who utilizes some of the strongest language possible to express his fidelity to Judaism. Lapidé confesses, ‘In all rabbinic literature I know of no more unequivocal, fiery acknowledgment of Israel’s holy scripture than this opening to the Instruction on the Mount’.<sup>194</sup> Indeed, no other verses in the Gospels constitute a clearer declaration of Jesus’ view of the Law. In addition to what Jesus makes explicit, it is also revealing what he does not say: he makes no attempt to exclude ritual or ceremonial commandments such as Sabbath observance, circumcision, or food laws from the sphere of valid Torah observance. If anything, Jesus stresses that even the most insignificant requirements of Moses are to be faithfully fulfilled by his community of followers. Even allowing the fact that he reforms certain aspects of Judaism, Jesus upholds the authority of *all* the Torah and thus confirms the ongoing practise of that faith. Despite what later church councils would rule about such matters, Levine is correct that ‘Jesus upheld the Law, and he expected his followers to do the same’.<sup>195</sup>

#### 2.4.3 Elucidating Torah

In light of Jewish expectation, Jesus’ awareness of his unique God-given status as prophet and messiah explains why he dutifully expounds the words of Torah, bringing interpretive clarification and correction where needed. Israel’s eschatological hope in the promise of a Moses-like prophet to arise and instruct his people (Deut 18.18) is reflected throughout the New Testament (John 1.21; 6.14; 7.40; Acts 3.22-26; 7.37; Heb 3.1-6) and the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q175). It appears that the book of 1 Maccabees shares the same anticipation, stating that Simon would only rule ‘until a trustworthy prophet should arise’ (14.41), most likely an allusion to Moses (Num 12.7). This prophet would also bring guidance concerning the proper place for the defiled stones of the altar (4.46).<sup>196</sup> The rabbis also regarded the messiah as one who would clarify the words of Moses: ‘When he, about whom it is written, “Lowly and riding upon an ass” [Zech 9.9] will come . . . he will elucidate for them the

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<sup>194</sup> Lapidé, *Sermon*, 14.

<sup>195</sup> Levine, *Misunderstood Jew*, 127.

<sup>196</sup> See D. Flusser, *Judaism of the Second Temple Period: Vol. 2, The Jewish Sages and Their Literature* (tr. A. Yadin; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 271.

words of the Torah . . . and elucidate for them their errors' (*Gen. Rab.* 98.9).<sup>197</sup> In the SOM and elsewhere, the manner in which Jesus teaches astonishes the crowds, 'for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes' (Matt 7.29; cf. Mark 1.22, Luke 4.32). This is evident in Matt 5.21-48, in which Jesus addresses five main subjects concerning murder (vv. 21-26), adultery (vv. 27-32), swearing falsely (vv. 33-37), retaliation (vv. 38-42), and neighbour-love (vv. 43-48).<sup>198</sup> Matthew's emphatic 'and I say to you' (ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν), a phrase repeated six times in this section, carries an authoritative tone in accordance with Matt 7.29.

Although these verses have been traditionally called the 'antitheses', this is a most unfortunate and spurious designation attributed to the second-century heretic, Marcion of Sinope, who was excommunicated from the Roman church for severing Jesus from the God of Israel and the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>199</sup> He and his followers inverted the wording of Matt 5.17, asserting that Jesus did indeed come to abolish and not fulfil the Torah.<sup>200</sup> Jesus' words in vv. 21-48 justified this radical revision, apparently left untouched by Jewish redactors; for within them, as they understood the passage, Jesus overtly contradicts Mosaic regulation, replacing it with his own morally superior directive. Thus for Marcion, the so-called antitheses represents the quintessential example of Jesus' antagonism toward the Law.

Most theologians have rightly dismissed this extreme position as fallacious and contradictory. However, a very common understanding of the passage appears to be somewhat of an amalgamation between Jesus' affirmation of Moses and Marcion's antinomianism. It is commonplace in Christian theology to speak of Jesus fulfilling and abolishing the Law; even the word 'fulfilment' has now come to convey both. Needless to say, there are many viewpoints in scholarship when it comes to Matt 5.17-41, with many heavily nuanced positions in various directions, either emphasizing Jesus' continuity with the Law, his discontinuity, or somewhere in-between. Käsemann presents the antithetical

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<sup>197</sup> Trans. from Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 191 n. 172.

<sup>198</sup> It is also common to group the antitheses into six subjects by listing divorce as a separate category. However, the shorter introduction in v. 31 ('It was also said'), combined with the related theme of sexual immorality suggests that Jesus' teaching on divorce should be grouped with adultery. See Evans, *Matthew*, 120.

<sup>199</sup> Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 1.19.

<sup>200</sup> Betz, *Sermon*, 176.

statements as though Jesus rivals or opposes Moses by ‘shattering the letter of the law’.<sup>201</sup> Others contend that Jesus does not intentionally contradict or abolish the Torah, but ‘bypasses’ parts of it,<sup>202</sup> or rather simply leaves the Law alone while ‘transcending’ it with his own instruction.<sup>203</sup>

Many scholars interpret the antithetical statements as though Jesus was indicating the inadequacy of the Torah.<sup>204</sup> It is often asserted that Jesus completes or ‘fills full’ those areas where the Torah shows deficiency, promulgating a superior ethical standard in view of the kingdom, the new covenant, or an eschatological return to ‘Edenic standards’,<sup>205</sup> even though such themes are hardly visible. Thus, the Mosaic Law may have been adequate for its time, perhaps even representing somewhat of a concession with Israel, but now pales in comparison to Jesus’ more excellent moral code. According to Chrysostom, Jesus ‘took the Law which was imperfect, he corrected it, formed and molded it, and brought it to a more perfect state’.<sup>206</sup> This perception of the Torah is, of course, at variance with the Psalms where it is extolled as ‘perfect’, ‘pure’, and ‘righteous’ (Ps 19.7-9; cf. 119). The Torah itself stipulates that ‘augmenting’ or ‘adding to’ its contents was just as prohibited as ‘diminishing’ or ‘removing’ anything (Deut 4.2; 12.32). Consequently, the concept of adding to God’s instruction was considered another form of abolishment.<sup>207</sup> However, this interpretation is incongruous with the prologue to the imperatives (5.17-20). If according to Jesus, the one who fulfils the least of the *mitzvot* is recompensed with great honour in the kingdom of God (5.19), there is hardly any need to exceed Moses. A closer analysis reveals that it is only the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees—not Moses—that he enjoins his followers to transcend (5.20). Furthermore, the structure of the SOM presents the Hebrew Scriptures as the basis for all its instruction (5.17; 7.12).<sup>208</sup> If Jesus sets a higher ethical standard for his community because obedience to the Mosaic code will no longer

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<sup>201</sup> E. Käsemann, ‘The Problem of the Historical Jesus’, in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, SBT 41 (London: SCM Press, 1964), 37.

<sup>202</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 198. Gundry, *Matthew*, 82, asserts that ‘Jesus contradicts neither the law nor current rabbinic interpretations of it. Rather, he carries out its tendencies to their divinely intended ends.’ His position, however, is inconsistent, since he presents Jesus countering certain allowances of the Torah (see 82-100).

<sup>203</sup> Banks, *Law*, 203.

<sup>204</sup> Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 174.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 193. A true return to Edenic standards would entail vegetarianism and nudism.

<sup>206</sup> P.W. Harkins (tr.), *John Chrysostom: On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, Vol. 72 of *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 258.

<sup>207</sup> Prov 30.6; Rev 22.18-19; *Did.* 4.13; *b. Shab.* 116b. See Betz, *Sermon*, 176.

<sup>208</sup> See Loader, *Attitude*, 184.

suffice, then the conclusion of the SOM to fulfil ‘the Law and the Prophets’ (7.12) is irrelevant and regressive.

Besides Matt 5.17, the antithetical formula that appears with variation in vv. 5.21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, and 43-44 remains the exegetical crux in deciphering Jesus’ attitude toward the Law in Matthew. When Jesus introduces each ethical injunction with ‘You have heard that it was said’, it is indisputable that he subsequently quotes or references commandments from the Torah. Yet it is equally important to recognize that Jesus includes paraphrased renditions as well, the most obvious example being the rewording of Leviticus 19.18: ‘love your neighbour and hate your enemy’ (5.43)—something Moses does *not* say. The difficulty is resolved when Jesus’ formula is examined within its original Hebrew context.

The evidence suggests that rabbis commonly spoke of interpretation by the expression ‘I hear’ (שומע אני), which was often followed by a subpar understanding of a biblical text.<sup>209</sup> For example, a commentary on the Decalogue command to ‘honour your father and mother’, states that one might ‘hear’ or ‘understand’ the injunction merely in terms of honouring them with words.<sup>210</sup> It continues to argue that such an interpretation is unsatisfactory—one must honour his or her parents by providing for their physical needs. Similarly, ‘to say’ was used to express how one should properly understand, as opposed to what one might ‘hear’ or gather from Scripture. In this fashion, rabbis would engage in discourse over the most suitable interpretation of a text, contrasting the other opinion with their own emphatic, ‘but I say to you’ (ואני אומר; cf. Matt 15.5; 19.9).<sup>211</sup> Matthew therefore intentionally contrasts what the populace has ‘heard’ Moses allegedly say from those who sit in his seat of authority (Matt 23.2) with what Jesus ‘says’—the more worthy interpretation of the Law and Prophets in accordance with what God has truly decreed.

Taking these similarities into consideration, no exact word-for-word parallel of the Matthean formula can be found in Jewish sources. Even so, to disregard the body of evidence as a result of this seems unjustified.<sup>212</sup> Not only might it be the case that Jesus’ way of speaking is an older form that later evolved into the rabbinic expressions, but one

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<sup>209</sup> Daube, *New Testament*, 55-62. Cf. Betz, *Sermon*, 208-11.

<sup>210</sup> *Mek.* on Exod 20.12.

<sup>211</sup> Luz, *Matthew*, 276. Lapide, *Sermon*, 44, notes that Rabbi Simeon ben Johai countered the position of Rabbi Akiba five times with this expression. Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, 506, contend that Jesus contrasts the OT rather than interpreting it.

<sup>212</sup> For example, Luz, *Matthew*, 278.

must also account for the different context of Jesus. The Synoptics present Jesus at odds with the scribes and Pharisees *collectively* (cf. Matt 23.1-36) and never present him countering the positions of individual rabbis by name. Neither does Jesus reference rabbis to confirm his instruction; Jesus refutes each deficient interpretation by going to the source, the Scriptures. It is therefore no coincidence that three of the six ethical injunctions (murder, divorce, and oaths) are directed against the practises of scribes and Pharisees elsewhere in Matthew (19.1-12; 23.16-22, 29-37). This critique is also evident in his subsequent teaching on almsgiving, prayer, and fasting (6.1-18), in which one's 'righteousness' (6.1; cf. 5.20) must be done in secret, in contrast to religious theatrics (cf. 23.5). In this regard, they may be considered 'antitheses', but not in the sense of Jesus *vis-à-vis* the Torah.

All things considered, Matthew 5.21-48 is best understood in terms of Jesus 'challeng[ing] certain interpretations and applications that some of his critics think are warranted by Scripture'.<sup>213</sup> This perspective of the SOM has been shared by early Reformers such as Luther and Calvin, and is advanced by a large consensus in scholarship today.<sup>214</sup> The Achilles' heel of this position, however, remains one of consistency. Turner, for example, after affirming Jesus as the Law's 'ultimate, definitive interpreter' posits: 'On one hand, Jesus does not contradict the law, but on the other hand, he does not preserve it unchanged.'<sup>215</sup> Others have deduced that Jesus only reaffirms the moral and ethical commandments, yet Jesus does not qualify his declaration in vv. 17-19 to indicate this.<sup>216</sup> Jesus cannot rightly represent the OT Scripture if he revises it, removing ritual observances such as the Temple sacrifice—the importance of which he affirms in 5.23-24. This, of course, does not necessitate that Jesus merely repeats Moses in static fashion. Whereas the false shepherds have 'taken away the key of knowledge' (Luke 11.52), as the anointed expositor of God's decrees, Jesus unlocks the ancient wisdom and swings wide the door of revelation.

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<sup>213</sup> Evans, *Matthew*, 120.

<sup>214</sup> See J. Pelikan (tr.), *Luther's Works: Vol. 21: The Sermon on the Mount (Sermons) and the Magnificat* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), 67-70; F.L. Battles (tr.), *Calvin: Institutes of Christian Religion: 1536 Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 2.8.7; Betz, *Sermon*, 205; Keener, *Matthew*, 181; Lapide, *Sermon*, 14-15; Liroy, *Decalogue*, 104-06; Evans, *Matthew*, 120; D.L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 167.

<sup>215</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, 167.

<sup>216</sup> Liroy, *Decalogue*, 30.



We now briefly treat Matthew 5.21-48 to show how Jesus clarifies the Scriptures. In vv. 21-26, Jesus opposes the idea that only the physical act of murder makes one liable for judgement. The assumption is based on an argument from silence—since the Decalogue command in Exodus 20.13 and Deuteronomy 5.17 prohibits bloodshed, it must tolerate anger and an unbridled tongue. Jesus sets the record straight. The meek that inherit the land (Ps 37.11; cf. Matt 5.5) are precisely those who ‘refrain from anger, and forsake wrath’ (Ps 37.8; cf. Prov 22.24-25); they utter wisdom and justice instead of malice (37.30; cf. Ps 39.1). Only he who does not insult nor harm his neighbour shall dwell on God’s holy hill (Ps 15.3).<sup>217</sup> ‘Kindness and mercy every man must show his brother’ and none should ‘imagine evil against his brother in [his] heart’ (Zech 7.9-10).<sup>218</sup> Early Jewish sources likewise recognize that the Torah ‘forbids harming anyone in thought or in deed’ (*Let. Aris.* 168)<sup>219</sup> and make an association between verbal abuse and murder: ‘The vapour and smoke of the furnace precede the fire; so insults precede bloodshed’ (Sir 22.24). According to Jesus, the solution to broken relationships is to proactively seek reconciliation (vv. 23-26; cf. Prov 16.7), which even takes precedence over sacrifice (vv. 23-24; Sir 28.2; *m. Yoma* 8.9).

In a similar vein, Jesus rejects the narrow notion that only the physical act of adultery makes one guilty of the fires of Gehenna (vv. 27-30). When Jesus states, ‘anyone looking upon a woman in order to covet her has already committed adultery with her in his heart’ (v. 28),<sup>220</sup> he dovetails two Decalogue commandments together—the prohibition of adultery (Exod 20.14; Deut 5.18) and the related prohibition of coveting another’s wife (Deut 5.21; Exod 20.17). It is not merely the person who abstains from the evil deed that is rewarded by God, but the one who is ‘pure in heart’ (Matt 5.8; cf. Ps 24.4; 51.10; 73.1). Josephus likewise concurs that true righteousness involves ‘refraining from every action, from every thought that is contrary to the laws originally laid down’ (*Ag. Ap.* 2.183 [Thackeray, LCL]). According to Sira 9.8, one must be careful not to gaze upon a married woman, but ‘turn away [his] eyes’—something David failed to do when ‘he looked’ upon Bathsheba washing herself (2 Sam 11.2). The rabbis also taught against ‘following your eyes’ in this regard (*Sifre* on Num 15.39); Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish deduced from Job

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<sup>217</sup> The Mishnah includes the one who publicly ‘whitens the face of another’ (i.e., insults, humiliates) in the list of those who have no share in the world to come (*Avot* 3.11).

<sup>218</sup> Translation mine.

<sup>219</sup> Shutt, ‘Aristeas’, 23.

<sup>220</sup> Translation mine.

24.15 ('the eye of the adulterer waits for the twilight') that 'no one should think that only one who engages in physical adultery is termed an adulterer. One who commits "adultery in his eyes" is also termed an adulterer.'<sup>221</sup> A post-Talmudic tractate bears striking resemblance to Jesus' words: 'Whoever looks lustfully at a woman is like one who has had unlawful intercourse with her.'<sup>222</sup> To keep one from judgement, Jesus calls for preventative measures to assist in self-restraint (vv. 29-30).

Continuing under the umbrella of adultery, Jesus then addresses the dangers of divorce (vv. 31-32). Divorce appears to have been a contested issue in first-century Judaism. Herod Antipas had divorced his spouse in order to remarry his brother's wife, which violated biblical law on two accounts (Exod 20.14; Lev 20.21). In this manner, one could easily circumvent the prohibition of adultery by simply divorcing his wife and marrying someone else. Indeed, Rabbi Akiva ruled that a man is permitted to send his wife away even if he found another woman more attractive (*m. Gittin* 9.10). A generation prior to Jesus, the Pharisees were radically divided on the issue, with the fulcrum of the debate over the interpretation of a phrase found in Deuteronomy 24.1: 'because he has found in her an indecent thing' (כי־מצא בה ערות דבר). The Hillelites advocated the view that one could divorce his wife for 'any reason' (Matt 19.3), whereas the Shammaites only recognized sexual immorality as legitimate grounds to annul the marital covenant.<sup>223</sup> As Moo observes, 'the root problem' that Jesus opposes 'is a liberal divorce procedure based on the Deuteronomy passage'.<sup>224</sup> In contrast to Hillel, Jesus takes the conservative stance of Shammai.<sup>225</sup> Like the Essenes, his perspective of marriage is rooted in the Torah's creation account (Gen 1.27; 2.24).<sup>226</sup> Although Jesus appeals to these verses from Genesis in Matthew 19.1-12, we may assume that other biblical books also influenced Jesus' *halakhic* position, most notably Malachi, which was also quoted by the Shammaites.<sup>227</sup> This is

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<sup>221</sup> *Lev. Rab.* 23.12; trans. by H. Basser and M.B. Cohen, *The Gospel of Matthew and Judaic Traditions: A Relevance-based Commentary*, BRLA 46 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 148.

<sup>222</sup> *Kallah* 1; trans. by Vermes, *Religion of Jesus*, 304.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>224</sup> Moo, 'Mosaic Law', 20.

<sup>225</sup> W.D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: CUP, 1963), 104, posits that Matthew's 'treatment, like that of Mark, in no way can be interpreted as a radical departure from the Law of Moses, but only as a radical interpretation of it, such indeed as Shammai gave'. Manson argues that Matthew conforms Jesus' teaching to the school of Shammai, but concedes that in reality, Jesus sided with neither party (*Sayings*, 136-38, 157-58).

<sup>226</sup> CD 2.24; 4.21.

<sup>227</sup> Such as R. Eliezer in *b. Sanh.* 22a.

because Jesus claimed his instruction was based upon the Law and Prophets, not simply the Mosaic Law (Matt 5.17; 7.12).

In Malachi we find another sacrificial altar awaiting human reconciliation first—not concerning a man’s brother, but ‘the wife of [his] youth’ (Mal 2.13-14). The prophet also appeals to Genesis by recognizing that God has made husband and wife ‘one’ (2.15) and castigates Israel for being ‘unfaithful’ to the marriage covenant of which God himself served as a witness (2.14). Hence, according to this passage, their sacrifices are refused because the act of divorce is a sin against one’s spouse and renders a man defiled: ‘he who hates and sends away his wife . . . covers his garment with violence’ (2.16).<sup>228</sup> Even if Malachi’s hearers followed the Mosaic procedure to complete a divorce certificate, their grounds for doing so were not legitimate. Jesus therefore deduces that if a marriage has not been validly terminated, the partners are not free to remarry (v. 32). It is possible that the *halakha* of the Hillelite Pharisees failed to integrate Deut 24.1-4 into a wider hermeneutic context, and was therefore rejected by Jesus as a biblically unsound license for infidelity.

The next subject Jesus discusses is oath-taking (vv. 33-37), the abuses of which were quite prevalent in his time. In referencing what his audience has heard, he presents an amalgamation of Scripture, most notably Leviticus 19.12, which prohibits swearing falsely in God’s name, and the various passages that admonish one to fulfil a vow (e.g., Deut 23.21; Ps 50.14). Jesus then enjoins his followers not to swear at all, by giving specific examples of pseudo-oaths. This is because the Pharisees had managed to circumvent the commandments by ruling that certain oaths may be retracted if not explicitly made in God’s name (Matt 23.16, 18). In Jesus’ conservative view, swearing by any circumlocution for God treads too close to profaning the divine name (Exod 20.7; Deut 5.11). One should not utter an oath by ‘heaven’ or ‘earth’ (vv. 34-35), for Scripture says, ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool’ (Isa 66.1).<sup>229</sup> Similarly, one must not swear by ‘Jerusalem’, for in the Psalms it is hailed ‘the city of the great King’ (Ps 48.2). Regarding such voluntary vows, the OT discourages one from making them. Although every oath must be taken in the Lord’s name as opposed to another deity’s, which would compromise monotheistic worship (Deut 6.13; 10.20), certain passages promote the idea that abstaining from swearing is the best path, for it prevents one from incurring sin (Deut 23.23; Eccl 5.4-5).<sup>230</sup> Such a

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<sup>228</sup> Translation mine.

<sup>229</sup> Cf. Matt 23.22.

<sup>230</sup> Hosea 4.2 even associates swearing with serious offenses such as stealing, adultery, and bloodshed.

perspective is shared by Ben Sira: ‘Do not accustom your mouth to oaths, nor habitually utter the name of the Holy One . . . The one who swears many oaths is full of iniquity’ (Sir 23.9-11). Even Jesus’ strict position, the abstention of all oaths, does not escape the confinements of Judaism; the Essenes, like orthodox Jews today, shared the same standard.<sup>231</sup> Like Jesus, Philo advised that a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ should suffice (*Spec. Laws* 2.2-4 and argues:

To swear not at all is the best course and most profitable to life, well suited to a rational nature which has been taught to speak the truth so well on each occasion that its words are regarded as oaths . . . for the mere fact of his swearing casts suspicion on the trustworthiness of the man’ (*Decalogue* 84 [Thackeray, LCL]).

This is precisely why Jesus closes by saying, ‘anything more than this comes from evil’ (v. 37), for by allowing people to weasel out of obligations in a game of clever formulas, the Pharisees were fostering deceit and fraud (Matt 23.16-22).

Perhaps the most misunderstood section of Jesus’ ethical injunctions is his instruction concerning retaliation (vv. 38-42), which Meier contends is ‘perhaps the clearest and the least disputable case of annulment in the antitheses’.<sup>232</sup> In stark contrast to the long-suffering ethic advocated by Jesus, it is commonly thought that Moses encouraged or allowed revenge. If there is an oft-repeated phrase to substantiate this claim, it is ‘an eye for an eye’ (Exod 21.23-25; Deut 19.21), which Jesus quotes in v. 38 in order to seemingly overturn.<sup>233</sup> Ironically, Daube and Vermes argue that this form of law, known as *lex talionis*, was actually intended to *limit* revenge, and in Jesus’ time was commonly understood in terms of monetary restitution for damages.<sup>234</sup> However, the examples Jesus gives—a shameful slap in the face, seizing someone’s tunic, and being forced to journey like a beast of burden—have more to do with insult than injury.<sup>235</sup> Jesus essentially answers the question: Does the law of *lex talionis* permit me to retaliate against the evildoer? His answer, of course, is no. Leviticus explicitly forbids taking vengeance and holding grudges (Lev 19.18) and Proverbs counsels: ‘Do not say, “I will repay evil”; wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you’ (Prov 20.22; cf. 24.29). The instruction to patiently endure

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<sup>231</sup> Philo, *Good Person*, 84; cf. Josephus, *J.W.* 2.135; *Ant.* 15.370-71.

<sup>232</sup> J.P. Meier, *Law and History in Matthew's Gospel: A Redactional Study of Mt. 5:17-48*, AnBib 71 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976), 157.

<sup>233</sup> Cf. Manson, *Sayings*, 159.

<sup>234</sup> Daube, *New Testament*, 254-265; Vermes, *Religion of Jesus*, 35-36; cf. Keener, *Matthew*, 196.

<sup>235</sup> Daube, *New Testament*, 260.

affliction and wait for the Lord's deliverance is comparatively found in Lamentations 3.26, which gives an example of such reproach: 'let him turn his cheek to the one who strikes, and let him be filled with insults' (3.30; cf. Matt 5.39). Jewish sources also attest to this non-retaliatory disposition toward offence. 'The vengeful will face the Lord's vengeance' (Sir 28.1), for 'it does not befit [worshippers of God] to repay evil for evil' (*Jos. Asen.* 23.9).<sup>236</sup> Similarly, those 'who hear themselves insulted and do not answer, who act out of love' are compared to the radiance of the sun (*b. Yoma* 23a).<sup>237</sup> Jesus therefore concludes with the imperative to return good for evil (v. 42), extending generosity even to the undeserving (cf. Ps 37.1-3, 26-27).

The prohibition of retaliation in Leviticus 19.18a culminates in what Jesus and the rabbis considered the great principle of the Torah: to love your neighbour as yourself. There was evidently a difference of opinion, however, as to how 'neighbour' should be defined (Luke 10.29). In vv. 43-48, Jesus counters an inadequate interpretation of Leviticus 19.18b: 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy'. As already mentioned, the second half of this statement is wholly absent from Scripture; it represents an 'inference that one might draw from the verse, that loving one's neighbour means that one should hate one's enemy'.<sup>238</sup> Such an interpretation restricts the applicability of the rule to 'your fellow who is like you' (לרעך כמוד). However, the context of Leviticus 19.18 deals with conflict and the proper response toward an adversarial neighbour: 'You shall not hate . . . you shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge, *but* you shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Lev 19.17-18; emphasis mine). Thus it is evident that love stands in contrast to hatred, retribution, and enmity. The call to love is not an emotional exercise, but one of action; it is not repaying evil for evil, but evil with good. Jesus enjoins his followers: 'Love your enemies, *do good* to those who hate you' (Luke 6.27; emphasis mine). Although this pithy juxtaposition of love and enemy was, without question, fresh and innovative, the concept beneath this expression was not. Josephus declared that the moral obligation of practicing benevolence, as inculcated by Moses in the Torah, extended 'even to declared enemies' (*Ag. Ap.* 2.211 [Thackeray, LCL]). One notable example is the commandment to return a

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<sup>236</sup> Trans. by C. Burchard, 'Joseph and Aseneth' in J.H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 2 (3rd edn; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 240; cf. 1QS 10.17-18.

<sup>237</sup> Trans. by Lapide, *Sermon*, 87.

<sup>238</sup> Bassler and Cohen, *Matthew*, 158; cf. Young, *Parables*, 104-05. The inadequate interpretation of Lev. 19.18 was probably buttressed with other passages such as Deut. 7.2, 16; Ps 139.21-22; Ps 119.113. In light of these, Gundry asserts that 'hate your enemy' accurately represents the Old Testament position that Jesus counters (*Matthew*, 96-97).

wayward ox or donkey to one's enemy and to assist him in rescuing his animal from danger (Exod 23.4-5). But in referencing 'water' and 'food', Josephus must also have in mind Proverbs 25.21-22, which teaches that God rewards one who provides such necessities to his enemy. A similar theme is echoed in 1 Samuel 24.17-19, where Saul commends David for repaying his enemy with kindness, thus making him 'more righteous' and worthy of heavenly reward. In accordance with Jesus' directive (Matt 5.44; Luke 6.28), one must bless and not curse, even offering prayer on their behalf (Ps 35.12-14; Job. 31.30). Similarly, the *Letter of Aristeas* admonishes one to 'practice goodwill to all men', including one's adversary, extending both generosity and prayer on their behalf (*Let. Aris.* 225-27).<sup>239</sup>

The 'as yourself' rendition of כַּמּוֹךְ in Leviticus 19.18b was understood that 'none should do to his neighbour what he does not like for himself' (*T. Naph.* 1.6),<sup>240</sup> or 'what you hate, do not do to anyone' (Tob 4.15). According to Judaism, therefore, Leviticus 19.18b was considered the 'theological root of the Golden Rule'.<sup>241</sup> Remarkably, the Targum presents an even stronger relationship between the two, namely, that the Golden Rule itself represents the Levitical commandment rephrased: 'And you shall love your neighbour: whatever you yourself hate, do not do to him' (*Tg. Ps.-J. Lev* 19.18).<sup>242</sup> This accords beautifully with Jesus' SOM, where Leviticus 19.18 in Matthew 5.43-48 forms the climax of the antithetical statements, while the Golden Rule in 7.12 functions as the apex of the entire message: 'Everything, therefore, that you want people to do to you, so you shall also do to them; for *this is* the Law and the Prophets'.<sup>243</sup> Indeed, this link is even more evident in the Lukan parallel on enemy-love, where the rule is centrally located (Luke 6.31). Since, according to Jesus and the Rabbis, 'love your neighbour' is the fundamental principle of Torah (and the Prophets), the Golden Rule also embodies all of God's commandments as well. In this way, Jesus' conclusion in 7.12 echoes the tradition attributed to Rabbi Hillel: 'What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow. This is the whole of the Torah' (*b. Shab.* 31a).<sup>244</sup>

Another prominent theme Jesus uses as a basis for enemy-love is the *imitatio Dei* (or *imitatio Patri*). Since the Lord is merciful and 'good to all' (Ps 145.9), blessing both the

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<sup>239</sup> Shutt, 'Letter of Aristeas', 27.

<sup>240</sup> Hebrew version.

<sup>241</sup> D.J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, SP 1 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 105.

<sup>242</sup> Trans. by Vermes, *Religion of Jesus*, 41.

<sup>243</sup> Translation mine.

<sup>244</sup> Trans. by Vermes, *Religion of Jesus*, 40; cf. Sir 31.15; *Did.* 1.2. Both a negative and positive form of the rule appears in *Let. Aris.* 207.

righteous and wicked (Matt 5.45), we must imitate his benevolence if we are to follow after him. Those who make peace shall be rightly be called ‘sons of God’ (Matt 5.9; cf. Deut 14.1), for children emulate their father. The call to imitation is also the basis for Leviticus 19 of the Holiness Code: ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy’ (Lev 19.2). According to Rabbi Meir, ‘God says: Be like me! As I repay evil with good, so may you also repay evil with good’.<sup>245</sup> In Matt 5.48, Jesus concludes with, ‘You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect’, which is based on a midrashic translation of Deuteronomy 18.13—instead of ‘You shall be perfect with the Lord your God’, Jesus renders *וְכַדְמָה* as ‘even as’ instead of ‘with’.<sup>246</sup> Such an injunction does not demand moral perfectionism, but rather requires one to be perfect in mercy and in deed (*Tg. Neof. Deut* 18.13; Luke 6.36). Numerous parallels are found in Jewish literature (*Let. Aris.* 208, ‘be inclined to mercy, even as God is merciful’;<sup>247</sup> *Sifre* [on Deut 11.22], ‘Just as God is called merciful, you too must be merciful’<sup>248</sup>). However, a strikingly similar tradition appears in Pseudo-Jonathan: ‘My people, children of Israel, as our Father is merciful in heaven, so you shall be merciful on earth’ (*Tg. Ps.-J. Lev* 22.28).<sup>249</sup> Thus, according to Jesus, it is good behaviour toward others, most notably the undeserving, that confirms one’s true status as a child of God.

As our analysis has shown, Jesus was elucidating the Law and the Prophets by giving his instruction to Israel. The driving ethical concepts of the SOM, most notably neighbour-love, the Golden Rule, and *imitatio Dei*, were all considered principal parts of the Torah’s DNA. The fact that the author of Pseudo-Jonathan specifically added the latter two into his Torah ‘translation’ shows just how inextricably linked these traditions were with early Judaism. Thus, according to Flusser, Jesus’ ethical statements ‘in no way cross the boundaries of contemporary Jewish thought or contradict accepted rabbinic values’.<sup>250</sup> Scholars often speak of Jesus intensifying, broadening, or radicalizing the Torah with such principles in view.<sup>251</sup> Although it may be argued that Jesus does indeed appear to extend

<sup>245</sup> *Exod. Rab.* 26.2 (on 17.8); trans. by Lapide, *Sermon*, 83.

<sup>246</sup> Cf. *Midr. Ps.* 119.10: ‘You shall be perfect with the Lord your God—even as He is perfect.’ See Bassler and Cohen, *Matthew*, 166–68.

<sup>247</sup> Shutt, ‘Letter of Aristes’, 26.

<sup>248</sup> Trans. by Vermes, *Religion of Jesus*, 201.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>250</sup> D. Flusser, *Origins*, 506.

<sup>251</sup> P. Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus* (2nd edn; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 40: ‘Jesus radically extends and intensifies the demands of the Law’; Wright, *Jesus*, 290, speaks of ‘Torah-intensification’; Levine, *Misunderstood Jew*, 47: ‘Jesus does not

commandments beyond their original meaning, the question to ask, rather, is: Did Jesus believe he was doing so? His demands were, no doubt, greater than others, which he acknowledges himself (Matt 5.20); but what we find absent in Jesus' instruction is the impression of any attempt to outdo Moses. As Martin Luther posits, how can the standard be set higher than love itself?<sup>252</sup> Jesus believed that the ethical teaching he was imparting was a true and pure representation of the Hebrew Scriptures.

## 2.5 Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter, the cultural context of Jesus was highly conservative and devout, with the Torah as the nucleus of first-century Jewish life. Notwithstanding that certain differences of belief and praxis existed in early Judaism, the evidence suggests that virtually all Jews were uniform in their devotion to the basic Torah observances. In contrast to presentations of the Jesus Seminar, Jesus' Galilean environment was likewise typically Jewish to the core. His familial context described by Matthew, and especially Luke, reveals an exceptionally pious upbringing—a fact that evidently bore great significance for these Gospel writers.

The Jesus that emerges in the Synoptics observes the Torah in his personal life and operates within the normative social structures of Judaism (i.e., the synagogue and Temple). He was commonly regarded as a rabbi or teacher, but as his ministry unfolded, his reputation grew into loftier terms. Following in the footsteps of the Hebrew prophets and his forerunner, John the Baptist, Jesus calls Israel back to Torah devotion, highlighting principal matters first and foremost, the bulk of which may be classified as ethical in nature. His public ministry resembled that of a miracle prophet like Elijah and Elisha, pronouncing judgement on the religious elite and the towns that refused to heed his message of *teshuvah*.

Although scholars continue to debate the authenticity of Matt 5.17-19, the SOM preserves Jesus' most explicit affirmation of the continuing validity of the Law and Prophets. The preface to his antithetical statements not only expresses his intention as a

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“oppose” the Law; he extends it”; J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 112: ‘he deepens them’; Gundry, *Matthew*, 100: ‘Jesus carried out the tendencies of the OT Law to their true ends’ by surpassing the commandments themselves.

<sup>252</sup> See Pelikan, *Luther's Works*, 69.



spiritual leader, but also his expectations for those who follow him: Even the very least of the *mitzvot* must be observed. Jesus' imperatives derived from his authoritative elucidation of Scripture vis-à-vis the inadequate applications that circulated under the influence of certain Pharisees and scribes. These ethical injunctions recorded by Matthew and Luke centre on key principles such as the *imitatio Dei*, the Golden Rule, and the command of neighbour-love, all of which were underscored in various strands of early Judaism. Therefore, the portrait cast of the Jewish Jesus in the Synoptics is quintessential in his fidelity to Moses, but exceptional in his reputation as a prophet and messianic figure. In many ways, Jesus' stance toward the Torah is more radically conservative than many of his contemporaries.

## **Matters of Controversy**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Alongside the devout Jesus presented in the Synoptic tradition are controversies between Jesus and his contemporaries over Torah-related matters. In attempting the noble task of rooting Jesus within first-century Judaism, some scholars have mistakenly minimized this conflict. Others have shown a tendency to retroject Christian supersessionism into these intra-Jewish debates, accentuating the discontinuity between Jesus and practises characteristic of Judaism. Yet, conflict does not inherently indicate that Jesus intended to distance himself from Judaism and the Torah. Considering that many scholars regard circumcision, Sabbath, and dietary laws as the three central identity markers of Judaism, however, if Jesus did challenge two of these practises, it would represent a radical departure from Torah norms. The Gospels, of course, do not present any conflict over the practise of circumcision; as we have already seen, Jesus' devout parents had him circumcised on the eighth day in accordance with Jewish custom. The fulcrum of scholarly debate is rather the issue of whether Jesus wilfully transgressed, abolished, or diminished the importance of Jewish adherence to Sabbath and dietary laws.

This chapter examines three primary controversies in the Markan tradition that involve Sabbath (§3.2), food and purity (§3.3), and the Temple (§3.4). Each section assesses what the conflict narratives reveal about Jesus' stance on the Torah and whether the drastic conclusions typically proposed in scholarship adequately represent Jesus' teaching and prophetic mission. Lastly, we present an overall interpretation of the data and what coherent message, if any, may be found in these controversies pertaining to Torah and Jewish praxis (§3.4).

### 3.2 Sabbath (Mark 2.23-28)

A recurring conflict between Jesus and his contemporaries was over correct observance of the Sabbath. Considering the prominent role the seventh day played in early Judaism, however, this should not come as any surprise. The importance of rest was never a matter of dispute between factions. As we have already seen, all Jews observed the day as a fundamental component of Jewish law. The definition of ‘labour’, however, was less concrete; Scripture did not provide an exhaustive list of prohibited acts for the Sabbath. Although there existed a ‘very wide agreement in Jewish society’ concerning the observance,<sup>253</sup> a vibrant clash of differing *halakha*, even within Pharisaism, had developed by the first century, and in this context proper observance of the Sabbath was undoubtedly at times a point of contention between parties.<sup>254</sup>

With the exception of one occurrence (Mark 2.23-28 and parallels), all Sabbath conflicts in the Synoptics concern the appropriateness of supernatural healing on the day of rest. The tension between providing medicine and labour is a subject that the rabbis address.<sup>255</sup> The general rule was that any infirmity or condition that posed no threat to one’s well-being—like the straightening of a limb or numbing the pain of toothache—should wait until Sabbath’s end.<sup>256</sup> Even so, the Talmud is not entirely consistent on the issue of when human suffering may be alleviated, which appears to have been a subject somewhat open to debate.<sup>257</sup> Jesus’ ministry, however, is another matter entirely since he does not resemble the role of a physician, but a wonderworker whose primary method of healing is the spoken word.<sup>258</sup> Prayer for the sick on the Sabbath was yet another contested issue between the two schools of Pharisaism (*t. Shab.* 16.22). Perhaps the Shammaites opposed the practise since it supplicated God to heal and thus work, but no reason is given. It is therefore possible that Jesus came under criticism because he sided with the more lenient and compassionate position of Hillel.

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<sup>253</sup> Harvey, *Constraints*, 37.

<sup>254</sup> See E.P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: Five Studies* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 6-16. Such minor differences are evident in *m. Shab.* 1.6; 22.1; *m. Sheb.* 10.7. The Essenes took a much more rigorous approach, even prohibiting defecation on the Sabbath (Josephus, *J.W.* 2.147-48).

<sup>255</sup> *m. Yoma* 8:6; *m. Shab.* 14.3-4; *t. Shab.* 12.8-14.

<sup>256</sup> *t. Shab.* 15.16; *b. Yoma* 84b-85b.

<sup>257</sup> For example, *b. Yoma* 84b presents a different opinion concerning the application of medicine and even allows one to warm water to refresh or hydrate a sick person.

<sup>258</sup> Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 21: ‘Talking is not regarded as work in any Jewish tradition, and so no work was performed’. Contra B. Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (2nd edn; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 211.

Jesus held a deep-seated conviction, not merely that healing was permissible, but that the seventh day was inherently the most opportune time to eliminate human suffering.<sup>259</sup> There are two possible reasons to account for this perspective. First, Jesus seems to have regarded healing on the Sabbath as an extension of the Torah's enjoiner to celebrate Sabbath as a day of deliverance (Deut 5.15; cf. Luke 13.10-17; Philo, *Moses* 2.22).<sup>260</sup> When he intentionally heals a woman with a curved spine, to the dismay of the synagogue ruler (Luke 13.10-17), he counters the objection with a *kal va-chomer* argument and an appeal to the theme of liberation embodied in the Sabbath day: if one should loosen their ox or donkey from servitude (cf. Deut 5.13), why not release a 'daughter of Abraham' from the bondage of Satanic infirmity? Another concept embedded into the theology of the Sabbath was its association with the age to come and the resurrection in Judaism.<sup>261</sup> This understanding of the Sabbath appears to be the reason behind the prohibitions of killing anything or bearing weapons on the day (*m. Shab.* 6.4; *t. Shab.* 16.21), for it was considered a time to celebrate life and *shalom*.<sup>262</sup> It seems plausible, therefore, that Jesus was intentionally provocative to counter what he believed to be unbiblical, restrictive regulations that did not accord with the spirit of the observance.<sup>263</sup>

The primary passage often used to support the argument that Jesus abrogated the commandment, or simply dismissed its importance, is the controversy generated by picking grain on the Sabbath (Mark 2.23-28; cf. Matt 12.1-8/Luke 6.1-5). Unlike all other Sabbath conflicts, this story neither centres on healing, nor any action on the part of Jesus himself. He and his party travel through the grainfields, where certain Pharisees reprimand Jesus for the behaviour of his disciples. To vindicate his followers, Jesus appeals to the story of David and the showbread (1 Sam 21.1-6) and the creation account in Genesis 1-2. His defence concludes with the enigmatic statement, 'the son of man is lord even of the Sabbath' (Mark 2.28), which apparently silences his critics. The debate ends abruptly as though Mark (as well as Matthew and Luke) carefully constructs the narrative to let Jesus' saying resonate.

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<sup>259</sup> Cf. Banks, *Law*, 130; Wright, *Jesus*, 60.

<sup>260</sup> According to Isa 14.3, liberty includes rest from 'pain and turmoil and harsh service'.

<sup>261</sup> Heb 4.9-11; *m. Tamid* 7.4; *LAE* 51.2. See also A.J. Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 73-76; Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus*, 187-89.

<sup>262</sup> Cf. Mark 3.4/Luke 6.9.

<sup>263</sup> Cf. Harvey, *Constraints*, 38; Flusser, *Sage*, 39.

Despite its brevity, this Sabbath controversy poses numerous interpretive challenges. For a start, some scholars dismiss the story as an incredulous tale, ‘like something out of a Broadway musical’.<sup>264</sup> Why is Jesus spending his Sabbath traversing grainfields in the first place? Does he also disregard Sabbath journey restrictions? Even more problematic, what are Pharisees doing in the same fields? Many details are omitted in the narrative. Were the disciples unable to prepare food the previous day? Was it considered legal for Jesus’ followers to consume wheat or barley from a privately owned field, and if so, according to what law? Moreover, the argumentation of Jesus’ defense has been notoriously difficult to understand, especially his reference to David’s consumption of the showbread—the text does not provide enough information to show conclusively why Jesus believed this example was relevant to his situation. Some scholars conclude that Jesus was simply ‘ignorant or confused about the nature of legal argument’;<sup>265</sup> others blame the Gospel writers themselves and their unfamiliarity with Jewish law.<sup>266</sup> Perhaps the complex nature of the pericope is due to the fact that three areas of Jewish law intersect in one story. There are the intricacies of Sabbath restrictions, the regulations concerning the Temple showbread, and the law of *Peah* (the crop reserved for the poor). When the story is examined within a devout Jewish framework, however, the nature of the dispute and Jesus’ instruction both cohere to form an important lesson about the role of the Sabbath.

Scholars who hold the position that the event is improbable fail to acknowledge two important points. First, there is no reason to suppose that a grainfield was beyond the two-thousand-cubit limit and that Jews would never be found in such a setting come the Sabbath.<sup>267</sup> According to *b. Shab.* 127a, a rabbi wishing to find a larger space for his disciples, clears an entire field of sheaves on the Sabbath. As Casey observes, the fact that they are in a grainfield on the Sabbath is taken for granted; the discussion rather focuses on whether lifting and moving so many sheaves on the Sabbath is permitted.<sup>268</sup> Second, it might appear strange that the Pharisees were spying on Jesus and his party, but Jesus was

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<sup>264</sup> J.P. Meier, ‘The Historical Jesus and the Plucking of the Grain on the Sabbath’, *CBQ* 66 (2004), 561-81, citing 573; cf. Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 214; P. Fredriksen, ‘The Birth of Christianity and the Origins of Christian Anti-Judaism’ in P. Fredriksen and A. Reinhartz (eds), *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism: Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 8-30, citing 16.

<sup>265</sup> Watson, *Law*, 225.

<sup>266</sup> Meier, ‘Plucking’, 579, differentiates between the historical Jesus and the Markan Jesus, whom he calls a ‘scriptural ignoramus’ and ‘a completely inept debater’.

<sup>267</sup> See A.J. Saldarini, *Matthew’s Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994), 128.

<sup>268</sup> P.M. Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark’s Gospel*, SNTSMS 102 (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), 140.

no ordinary rabbi. If Philo was correct in his assertion that myriads of zealous Jews kept watch for anyone subverting Jewish law (*Spec. Laws* 2.253), it is entirely plausible that a controversial Galilean prophet with a growing influence over the populace would be subject to scrutiny.<sup>269</sup>

Let us first examine the nature of the criticism levelled against Jesus for the behaviour of his disciples. Mark 2.23 states that on the Sabbath, Jesus was ‘passing through the grainfields’ (παραπορεύεσθαι διὰ τῶν σπορίμων), while his followers began ‘to make a way’ (ὁδὸν ποιεῖν), ‘plucking the heads of grain’ (τίλλοντες τοὺς στάχυνας). The Pharisees approach Jesus saying, ‘Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?’ (Mark 2.24). Thus, their rebuke concerns a violation of Sabbath, but what precise action did the Pharisees deem unlawful? Some scholars contend that the disciples were creating a path for their master through the grainfields.<sup>270</sup> Such an interpretation is hardly credible for the simple fact that one can hardly clear a path by picking ears of grain. The meaning of the phrase ὁδὸν ποιεῖν is best rendered ‘to make one’s way, to travel’ (cf. Judg 17.8 [LXX]) and parallels the former clause describing Jesus ‘passing through’ the area, most likely on an existing path with fields on either side.<sup>271</sup> What then is the purpose of presenting Jesus as journeying separately from his disciples? It is likely that Mark intends to make a distinction between the conduct of Jesus and the plucking action of those following him, for it is his disciples who are accused of breaking the Sabbath.<sup>272</sup> Thus from the outset of the narrative, Jesus is beyond reproach in his personal adherence to the commandment.

Most scholars conclude that Jesus’ disciples were ‘plucking’ ears from standing grain, thus contravening the Sabbath prohibition of קצר, ‘harvesting’ or ‘reaping’ (Exod 34.21). However, Crossley shows that this is far from conclusive. All three Synoptics use the verb τίλλω, meaning ‘pluck, pick’ which was often used in antiquity to refer to the act of removing hair or feathers.<sup>273</sup> The LXX translates קציר/קצר with multiple Greek words,

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<sup>269</sup> See Wright, *Jesus*, 379-80.

<sup>270</sup> See A.Y. Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 200-02. Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 239, proposes that this act might constitute ‘a partial fulfillment’ of preparing the way of the Lord (Isa. 40.3). However, in the Synoptics, this verse represents a return to Torah faithfulness, not a wanton disregard of Moses.

<sup>271</sup> See R.H. Stein, *Mark*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 144-45; R.H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 139-40.

<sup>272</sup> See Gundry, *Mark*, 140.

<sup>273</sup> BDAG, s.v. τίλλω.

and τίλλω is not one of them.<sup>274</sup> The three times τίλλω does appear in the LXX, it is never used with reference to harvesting. Furthermore, the act of plucking is not listed among the thirty-nine prohibited labours of the Mishnah (*m. Shab.* 7.2; *Avot Melakhot*), but found in later rabbinic writings.<sup>275</sup> Casey and Crossley therefore conclude that the prohibition of plucking represents a stricter *halakha* still under development during Jesus' time.<sup>276</sup> Although this may be possible, it is important to recognize that the Mishnah's list is called *Avot Melakhot*, 'fathers of works', meaning they served as *primary* prohibited actions or *categories* of activity as opposed to an exhaustive list.<sup>277</sup> Indeed, there is good evidence that plucking food on the Sabbath was forbidden by most Jews in the time of Jesus. According to the *halakha* known by Philo, one was not permitted 'to pluck [δρῆψασθαι] any fruit whatsoever' (*Moses* 2.22 [Colson, LCL]). Although this does show that the prohibition of plucking fruit was accepted (at least in some circles), it is difficult to ascertain whether Philo would apply this regulation to grain, which, unlike grapes and figs, was not harvested by hand.

Rabbis did make allowances for minor, irregular works to be performed on the Sabbath. For example, even though preparing food on the Sabbath was forbidden, one was permitted to cut with a knife handle (instead of using the blade).<sup>278</sup> Since reaping with a sickle was the standard method of harvesting wheat or barley, picking some grain by hand for immediate consumption cannot be classified as a direct violation of biblical law. Grains were not usually eaten raw, but processed into bread, the staple diet of first-century Palestine. This, of course, was a laborious task, involving eleven steps from sowing to baking—all of which are listed in the *Avot Melakhot*.<sup>279</sup> We may therefore conclude that plucking grain was in essence an irregular method with regard to labour, since grain was always harvested by sickle. However, although it is not listed in the Mishnah, plucking may have been regarded as a subcategory and thus constituted 'a lesser violation of Sabbath law'.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Crossley, *Date*, 160-61.

<sup>275</sup> *t. Shab.* 9.17; *y. Shab.* 7.2; *b. Shab.* 103a.

<sup>276</sup> Casey, *Aramaic Sources*, 146-47; Crossley, *Date*, 161-62.

<sup>277</sup> See N.L. Collins, *Jesus, the Sabbath and the Jewish Debate: Healing on the Sabbath in the 1st and 2nd Centuries CE*, LNTS 474 (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 100.

<sup>278</sup> *t. Shab.* 14.16.

<sup>279</sup> 'Plucking' is likely absent from the list simply because it wasn't a step in the bread-making process.

<sup>280</sup> Collins, *Jewish Debate*, 100.

Before examining Jesus' defence of his disciples, it is important to explain why Jesus' disciples were justified in taking grain from a private field from the start. The common view that they were casually plucking ears of grain according to Deuteronomy 23.25 poses a serious problem: early rabbinic sources unanimously restrict this right to the hired labourer.<sup>281</sup> If such a restriction was in place during Jesus' time, then it leaves one other possibility—the law of *Peah* (lit., 'corner' or 'edge'; Lev 19.9-10; 23.22). This umbrella term included the unharvested edges of a field, the 'forgotten' sheaf, any fallen crop, and a portion of harvest that the farmer chose to give away. Although Mark does suggest that the disciples were 'in need' and 'hungry' at the time (2.25), it is difficult to show conclusively that they were considered poor.<sup>282</sup> A third, more likely option is that the disciples were gleaning *after* the poor, when the remaining scraps were open to everyone for a short time before the birds finished the rest (*m. Peah* 8.1). If this interpretation is correct, then the disciples were not walking through fields of standing grain, but gleaning the few remains of an already harvested field.<sup>283</sup> Interestingly, certain manuscripts of Luke 6.1 include the word ἐν σαββάτῳ δευτεροπρώτῳ, which records when this event took place—during harvest, the second Sabbath from the counting of the *omer* (sheaf).<sup>284</sup>

According to Flusser and Safrai, who adhere to this approach, the disciples would not have plucked ears of grain.<sup>285</sup> Rather, the controversial action involved how they removed the husks by 'rubbing them in their hands' (Luke 6.1) instead of using their fingers, a known debated issue in rabbinic literature.<sup>286</sup> Thus, the disciples were picking up heads from the ground, rather than plucking them from stalks. But this view poses a major hurdle: the verb τίλλω is multiply attested in the Synoptic tradition. Flusser posits that the word was absent in the original account, and was later added due to 'a misunderstanding on

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<sup>281</sup> *m. Baba Metz.* 7.2-5; *Tg. Neof.* Deut 23.26(25); cf. *Kallah Rabbati* 52b. Some scholars speculate that such a restriction was not always strictly followed or that it was a later development. See Casey, *Aramaic Sources*, 143.

<sup>282</sup> Jesus implies that at least some disciples abandoned fields for his sake, which may have made them eligible for *Peah* (Mark 10.29-30; cf. *m. Peah* 5.5-6).

<sup>283</sup> Collins, *Jewish Debate*, 33-34, bases her argument on the assumption that σπορίμων can only refer to fields of 'growing grain' rather than grainfields, irrespective of whether they have been harvested or not.

<sup>284</sup> Since it is a strange word, it is likely authentic, even though it is not found in the oldest manuscripts.

<sup>285</sup> D. Flusser, *Sage*, 35; idem, 'Jesus in the Context of History' in A.J. Toynbee (ed.), *The Crucible of Christianity: Judaism, Hellenism and the Historical Background to the Christian Faith* (New York: World Publishing, 1969), 225-234, citing 225; S. Safrai, 'Sabbath Breakers', Jerusalem Perspective web site (<http://www.jerusalemerspective.com/2488>; accessed August 2016).

<sup>286</sup> *b. Beitz.* 13b. Scholars often reference *b. Shab.* 128a, but its relevance is debated since the context does not mention grain, but herbs. Perhaps the principle still applies, however.



the part of the Greek translator'.<sup>287</sup> There is, however, another possibility seldom mentioned in scholarship. The closest parallel from Greek literature, which uses τίλλω in the context of grain, is the first-century BCE description of early Britons by Diodorus Siculus. In *Bibliotheca Historica* 5.21.5, the verb is used to refer to the act of picking or selecting heads of grain *after* they have been harvested. It is entirely plausible, therefore, that the disciples were picking heads of grain from the ground (or perhaps from 'forgotten' sheaves).

But if this were the situation, what would explain the offense of the Pharisees? Some might have considered rubbing grain with their hands a minor form of threshing, but certainly not everyone. It is more likely that Luke records this detail not to make this activity the crux of the controversy, but to clarify that the disciples were solely using their hands and not flagrantly violating Sabbath with a tool. The controversy becomes clearer in light of the *halakha* found in the Damascus Document (CD):

A man may not go about in the field to do his desired activity on the Sabbath. . . . A man may not eat anything on the Sabbath except food already prepared. From whatever was lost in the field *he may not eat*, and he may not drink unless he was in the camp.<sup>288</sup>

Although CD represents a more rigorous approach to the Sabbath, the regulations here accord with various Jewish sources.<sup>289</sup> The simple fact that the disciples were eating food from a field on the Sabbath would be enough to offend the scrupulous Pharisee. As this passage makes evident, even fruit lying in the fields—that which didn't even require plucking—was forbidden for consumption.<sup>290</sup> Interestingly, *m. Pesach*. 4.8 records that the Sages reproved the men of Jericho over this issue; they had a custom of helping the poor enter fields in order to consume fallen fruit on the Sabbath day.<sup>291</sup> With this background in view, the primary point of contention between Jesus and the Pharisees was likely that his followers were eating the produce of the fields rather than food previously prepared. This constituted no major breach of Sabbath law by any means; rabbis did not stone the men of

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<sup>287</sup> Flusser, 'Context of History', 225. However, Flusser does not provide any evidence to support this claim.

<sup>288</sup> CD 10.21-23; trans. by M.O. Wise, M. Abegg, Jr., and E.M. Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (rev. edn.; San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 71-72; emphasis mine.

<sup>289</sup> *Jub.* 2.29-31; 50.12; Philo, *Moses* 2.22; *m. Betz.* 5.2.

<sup>290</sup> Thus, the statement of Loader, *Attitude*, 52, 'There is no law or law interpretation known to us which Jesus' disciples would be contravening', appears to ignore early Jewish sources.

<sup>291</sup> *b. Pesah.* 56a; *b. Menah.* 71a.

Jericho, but expressed their strong disapproval. Yet, for Jesus' critics, it was enough to reprimand him for the apparent laxity of his disciples.

This understanding of the narrative is further corroborated by Jesus' response to the Pharisees. In defence of his disciples, he first appeals to the story of David and the showbread. At first glance, this story would appear to be irrelevant to the subject of the Sabbath. However, as Casey has shown, the actions of David were associated with the Sabbath, because this was the day when the priests would arrange and partake of the showbread (Lev 24.8-9; 1 Chr 9.32).<sup>292</sup> This relationship is evident in a rabbinic discussion of this story found in *Yalqut Shimoni* 2.130:

Now it was the sabbath, and David saw that they were baking the Bread of the Presence on the sabbath, as Doeg had taught them. He said to them, 'What are you doing? Baking it does not override (דוחה) the sabbath, but only arranging it, as it is written "on the sabbath day he shall arrange it" (Lev. 24.8).' Since he found there only the Bread of the Presence, David said to him, 'Give it to me so that we may not die of hunger, for danger to life overrides the sabbath'.<sup>293</sup>

The legendary discussion between David and the priests concerning the baking and arranging of the loaves reveals that the law of the showbread was related to Sabbath law. It seems that at this time, priestly duties that took place on the Sabbath and general Sabbath day regulations were more closely related.<sup>294</sup> Therefore, Jesus' argument presupposes the relationship between the Sabbath and showbread regulation, and his illustration of David and the 'Bread of the Presence' is relevant to his situation.

Jesus relates what his disciples were 'doing' (ποιοῦσιν, Mark 2.24) to that which David and his associates 'did' (ἐποίησεν, v. 25): They ate prohibited Sabbath food (v. 26). In David's case, the unlawful action was quite serious—they consumed the holy loaves of bread that were arranged in the Temple before the Most Holy Place, an offering reserved only for the priesthood. In Jesus' case, his disciples ate a few grains (a parallel to bread) from the field, a forbidden action that pales in comparison. Thus, Jesus' logic is clear and reasonable—if, because of hunger, David could suspend a major regulation and be justified in doing so, how much more then, could his disciples suspend a minor regulation and be guiltless of transgression?<sup>295</sup> Of course, the story in 1 Samuel does not mention whether

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<sup>292</sup> Cf. *m. Sukk.* 5.7-8; *m. Menah.* 11.7; *b. Pesah.* 47.a; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.255-256.

<sup>293</sup> Trans. by Casey, *Aramaic Sources*, 154-55.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 155-56.

<sup>295</sup> Cf. Matt 12.7.

David was on the verge of starvation, although it may have been the case. Similarly, Mark does not tell his audience why the disciples are in need, but the logic in Jesus' argument implies that their hunger was real (cf. Matt 12.1).<sup>296</sup> There is no reason to assume they were casually snacking as some scholars suggest.<sup>297</sup> Itinerant rabbis and their followers were often reliant on the hospitality of others; susceptibility to hunger and exhaustion were certainly not uncommon.

Continuing his defence and the principle that human need overrides Sabbath law, Jesus highlights the very purpose of the commandment: 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath' (Mark 2.27). The often-cited rabbinic parallel, 'The Sabbath is delivered to you and you are not delivered to the Sabbath',<sup>298</sup> echoes the essence of Jesus' teaching: Humankind is given dominion over the Sabbath law. Since the *mitzvah* was given to benefit Israel, it was widely held that certain occasions necessitated a suspension of the observance in favour of human welfare. Although the saying attributed to R. Simeon ben Menasya bears much resemblance, there are minor differences. R. Simeon bases his teaching on Exodus 31.14, in which the commandment is given 'to you' (i.e., Israel). He also plays upon the Hebrew word *מסר*, which can be used in the sense of 'handing over' something in a chain of tradition (cf. *m. Avot* 1.1) or of delivering someone over to the authority of another.<sup>299</sup> Jesus, however, alludes to the creation account in Genesis, referring to Sabbath as that which God 'created' for the sake of 'man'.<sup>300</sup> A similar argument is found in 2 Baruch 14.18 to establish humankind's preeminence: 'he was not created for the world, but the world for him'.<sup>301</sup> Such is reminiscent of Psalm 8.4-6, in which God is praised for crowning 'man' or the 'son of man' with 'glory and majesty', placing all things in subjection to his rule (cf. 4 Ezra 6.54).

Since the Sabbath came into being for the sake of humanity, it naturally follows that 'man' is sovereign. Thus, Jesus' concluding statement in 2.28 is best understood as a

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<sup>296</sup> See Casey, *Aramaic Sources*, 143; Sanders, *Jewish*, 21; W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, Jr., *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew: Vol. 2, Introduction and Commentary on Matthew 8-18*, ICC (2nd edn; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 305. Contra Moo, 'Mosaic Law', 8; Gundry, *Mark*, 142; Watson, *Law*, 38: 'Their conduct is rather wanton or careless disregard of the Sabbath'.

<sup>297</sup> See Loader, *Attitude*, 52.

<sup>298</sup> *Mek. Shab.* I on Exod 31.12-17.

<sup>299</sup> A similar tradition found in *b. Yoma* 85b reinforces this idea by speaking of being delivered to the Sabbath's 'hand', a synonym for 'power'.

<sup>300</sup> Mark uses ἐγένετο, 'came into being', which is used in both John 1.3 and Gen 1-2 (LXX) in the sense of 'created'. See R.A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, WBC 34A (Dallas, Texas: Word, 1989), 124; Gundry, *Mark*, 142.

<sup>301</sup> Trans. by A.F.J. Klijn, '2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) of Baruch' in J.H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 1 (3rd edn; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 626.

logical inference of this truth: ‘Therefore, the son of man is lord, even of the Sabbath’ (2.28).<sup>302</sup> Although most scholars hold that the phrase ‘the son of man’ is used in a Christological sense, in this context it seems more likely that Jesus is referring back to ‘man’ with a synonymous expression, similar to the Hebrew parallelism in Psalm 8.4. This is because Mark’s use of ὥστε (‘and so, therefore’) naturally implies that v. 28 is the consequence or result of Jesus’ previous statement about ‘man’ (v. 27). Even if Jesus does indirectly refer to his own exalted status here, it is only by extension of that authority bestowed on humankind in general. Although the motif of his authority appears more pronounced in Matthew and Luke’s version of the story, Jesus does not convey the slightest notion that he was declaring himself or his disciples free from the obligation to observe the Sabbath. Rather, the story illustrates an example of a *temporary suspension* of a minor Sabbath regulation due to special circumstances. As such, it fails to constitute an abrogation of the commandment, which Jesus and his followers assume is still binding (Matt 24.20; Luke 23.56). Any assertions to the contrary fail to recognize that Mark 2.28 represents Jesus’ clearest verbal affirmation of the Sabbath. To claim that the Sabbath was created for humankind naturally implies that the God-given practise is something vital and beneficial.

Holmén, however, concludes that Jesus’ ‘behavior reflects a strikingly indifferent attitude towards the commandment’ rather than a ‘for-against’ position.<sup>303</sup> After conceding that v. 27 implies that the Sabbath is ‘a good thing’ that Jesus confirms and does not denounce, Holmén contrarily asserts that if ‘taken as an isolated saying’ it ‘can be used to argue anything’ and therefore ‘proves nothing’.<sup>304</sup> But why would proper methodology require this logion to be interpreted in isolation, ignoring context? Indeed, similar rabbinic sayings about the Sabbath could be lifted from their devout milieu to support the same conclusion. The aforementioned saying from R. Simeon ben Menasya is comparatively never subjected to the obfuscation imposed by scholarship as with Mark 2.27. Similarly, the saying ‘Make your Sabbath profane, and do not depend on people’ (*b. Shab.* 118a)<sup>305</sup> could also be used to promote Torah-laxity, but this would be an egregious error. As already shown, a comprehensive assessment of the Synoptics reveals that Jesus and his disciples customarily observed the Sabbath. Just like the rabbinic sayings, v. 27 must be interpreted through the lens of the entire tradition.

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<sup>302</sup> Translation mine.

<sup>303</sup> Holmén, *Covenant Thinking*, 105.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>305</sup> Trans. by Casey, *Aramaic Sources*, 162.

Mark also intended these words of Jesus to be read within the broader literary context of Mark 2.23-3.1-6. All three Synoptics couple this event with another Sabbath controversy—the healing of a man with a withered hand (Matt 12.9-14//Mark 3.1-6//Luke 6.6-11). This is significant because Jesus continues the same humanitarian perspective: the importance of saving life and doing good on the Sabbath (Mark 3.4; cf. *m. Yoma* 8.6). In the former story the Pharisees challenge Jesus concerning what is ‘lawful’. In the latter, it is Jesus who confronts the Pharisees with the same question. Thus, we actually have an exchange of criticism and a clash of opposing views. If Jesus displays a general indifference to the Sabbath commandment, why does he express concern over what is permitted? His engagement implies the opposite; like the controversy of consuming grain, Jesus is engaged in an intra-Jewish debate and takes a passionate stand for what he holds to be the right perspective of Torah.<sup>306</sup> Thus, this analysis has shown that Jesus affirms the importance of Sabbath observance, while upholding the perspective that the preservation of human life overrides the commandment—both of which fundamentally accord with rabbinic Judaism.

### 3.3 Food and Purity (Mark 7.1-23)

Since at least the mid-third century, Mark 7.1-23 has been presented as a clear indicator of Jesus’ departure from Torah norms, specifically his negation of biblical dietary laws or *kashrut*. The fulcrum of the pericope—‘There is nothing outside the man that by entering him can defile him, but the things which come out of the man are what defile him’ (7.15)<sup>307</sup>—has been deemed ‘perhaps the most radical statement in the whole of the Jesus-tradition’,<sup>308</sup> ‘an entirely new understanding of what does and does not constitute defilement’,<sup>309</sup> and ‘a strong contravention of the law’.<sup>310</sup> This verse is often coupled with the phrase, ‘declaring all foods clean’ (7.19b), commonly regarded as a parenthetical comment by Mark that further confirms Jesus’ reversal of the dietary code (Lev 11; Deut 14.1-21). Consequently, of all the Synoptic material, this Markan pericope has come to

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<sup>306</sup> E.P. Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 23, acknowledges that ‘the synoptic Jesus behaved on the sabbath in a way which fell inside the range of current debate about it, and well inside the range of permitted behaviour’.

<sup>307</sup> Translation mine.

<sup>308</sup> N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 150.

<sup>309</sup> Banks, *Law*, 141.

<sup>310</sup> Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 91.

represent the most formidable break of Jesus with early Judaism and Torah.<sup>311</sup> Thus, an accurate analysis of this section is vitally important in shaping how one perceives Jesus and his regard for the Law.

An interpretive error common with many treatments of Mark 7.1-23 is the failure to distinguish between laws pertaining to dietary restrictions and those concerning purity. Food laws are often mistakenly classified within the sphere of purity, when in reality, these were regarded as two distinct bodies of Jewish law and therefore ‘deserve separate treatment’.<sup>312</sup> The code of *kashrut* deals with permitted and forbidden meat, whereas purity regulations address the ritual cleansing of people and objects, originally applicable only to the Temple precincts. Contravention of the former was sin and resulted in spiritual defilement;<sup>313</sup> there was no purification rite to remedy the consumption of prohibited, ‘abominable’ food (e.g., Lev 11.10).<sup>314</sup> Becoming impure, however, was a normative part of daily life. Only the wilful negligence of purification procedures, typically involving immersion in water, constituted a breach of Torah and thus transgression. These categories also differ in that laws of *kashrut* did not develop to the extent that purity laws did. As with Sabbath observance, Second-Temple Judaism elaborated upon purity rites and promulgated practises far beyond the requirements of Torah.<sup>315</sup>

Having established this distinction, we are now ready to identify the context of the pericope. Mark begins his narrative by revealing that certain Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem had gathered around Jesus and observed that ‘some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed’ (v. 2, NASB). For further clarification, vv. 3-4 elaborate on common Jewish cleansing practises subsumed under ‘the tradition of the elders’: the washing of hands (or full immersion, v. 4) before meals, along with the

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<sup>311</sup> See Dunn, *Law*, 37-38; Klausner, *Jesus*, 290-91; D. Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: New Press, 2012), 107.

<sup>312</sup> Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 24; cf. J. Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 31-32; Boyarin, *Jewish Gospels*, 107. This is attested by the Mishnah, where *kashrut* is categorized under *Seder Kodashim* (Order of Holy Things) instead of *Seder Toharot* (Order of Purities). The confusion lies in the fact that the OT uses the same set of terms, טָהוֹר and טָמֵא, for both areas of law.

<sup>313</sup> This defilement of the soul is found in Ezek 4.14 (cf. Dan 1.8; 1 Macc. 1.62-63). See Y. Furstenberg, ‘Defilement Penetrating the Body: A New Understanding of Contamination in Mark 7.15’, *NTS* 54.2 (2008), 176-200, citing 179 n. 7; Klawans, *Impurity*, 31-32.

<sup>314</sup> Cf. Flusser, *Sage*, 34: ‘A person’s body does not become ritually impure even when one has eaten animals forbidden by the Law of Moses!’ The eating of carrion is the only thing that renders a person unclean (Lev 17.15), but as Furstenberg, ‘Defilement’, 195, observes, ‘the parallel verses in Lev 11.39-40 do not distinguish between eating a carcass and touching it’.

<sup>315</sup> Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 29-42; P.J. Tomson, ‘Jewish Food Laws in Early Christian Community Discourse’, *Semeia* 86 (1999), 193-211, citing 199.

‘washings of cups, vessels, utensils, and tables’. The importance of hand purity in early Judaism is attested by the fact that an entire tractate in the Mishnah, *Yadayim* (‘hands’), is devoted to the subject. Moreover, a second-century rabbi was excommunicated for doubting the validity of the practise (*m. Eduy.* 5.6), and the Talmud later warns that anyone making light of handwashing would be ‘uprooted from the world’ (*b. Sotah* 4b).<sup>316</sup> Interestingly, Mark’s inclusion of *πυγμῆ* (‘with a fist’) in v. 3 accurately describes the process of how this rite was performed, indicating that he is not ignorant of Jewish Palestinian customs as often supposed.<sup>317</sup> Thus, Mark has taken great pains to establish a proper context for his readers; his opening commentary sets the stage for a discussion that concerns purity, not *kashrut*.

Following this background information, undoubtedly included for a Gentile audience, the controversy begins as the Pharisees and scribes probe Jesus: ‘Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?’ (v. 5, NASB). Their question reveals three important interpretative keys: (1) the implicit logic, confirmed by vv. 15, 18, is that impure hands would render food contaminated, which if eaten, would transfer that impurity to the body; (2) the conflict centres on purity laws; and (3) the criticism concerns a neglect of tradition, not Torah-prescribed rites.

The conservative nature of Jesus’ rebuttal is particularly noteworthy. Turning on his interlocutors, he accuses them of a much weightier infringement: They disregard the very commandments of God. He begins by quoting Isaiah 29.13 to equate their traditions with empty worship (vv. 6-7). In shallow pretence, they honour God with their ‘lips’ (i.e., the purity of food), but their hearts are far removed from his presence (i.e., they are internally impure). Jesus then gives one prime example of how their teaching invalidates the Torah (vv. 10-12): They allow men to circumvent the obligation to honour parents (Exod 20.12), which, Jesus reminds them, is a capital offence (Exod 21.17//Lev 20.9). Jesus repeatedly contrasts the command of God with the tradition of men (vv. 8, 9, 13), an antithesis also evident in Jesus’ rhetoric: ‘*Moses* said . . . but *you* say . . .’ (vv. 10-11, emphasis mine).

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<sup>316</sup> In contrast to later tradition, Flusser contends that handwashing was only voluntary in Jesus’ day. See Flusser, ‘Context of History’, 225. Cf. Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 40; Watson, *Law*, 58-59.

<sup>317</sup> J.G. Crossley, ‘Halakah and Mark 7.3: “with the hand in the shape of a fist”’, *NTS* 58.1 (2012), 57-68; cf. S.M. Reynolds, ‘Πυγμῆ (Mark 7:3) as “Cupped Hand”’, *JBL* 85.1 (1966), 87-88; Marcus, *Mark* 1-8, 441. This custom is still observed by practicing Jews today.

Consequently, in no other Markan pericope is Jesus' zeal for 'God's word' (v. 13), the Torah, more plainly manifest.

Jesus then summons the crowd and bids them to listen with understanding (v. 14). The precise meaning of Jesus' saying that follows (v. 15) has been debated ever since the early Church Fathers. One predominant view is that it represents Jesus' official abolishment of *kashrut* and the purity system. A growing number of scholars, however, hold that such an interpretation is historically implausible.<sup>318</sup> As we have already seen in §2.2, diet formed a characteristic and commonplace feature of Jewish life. Additionally, as the history of the Maccabean Revolt demonstrates, *kashrut* represented both an adherence to the Mosaic covenant and an indispensable component of Jewish practise (e.g. 1 Macc 1.62-63). Had Jesus opposed Moses so plainly, 'he might well have started a riot',<sup>319</sup> resulting in his immediate arrest or even death.<sup>320</sup> Furthermore, this view is incongruent with the position of Luke-Acts, which presumes the continued validity of Torah observance for Jews, and does not account for the controversy over food that arose within the Gentile church (e.g., Rom 14.14; Gal 2.11-14).

An alternative approach regards Jesus' statement as a prophetic emphasis of moral purity over ritual purity. The contrasting formula, 'not A, but B', is one example of Jesus employing Hebraic 'dialectical negation', which conveys the sense of 'B is more important than A', as opposed to meaning 'either A or B'.<sup>321</sup> For example, when Jesus expresses his intention 'not to call the righteous, but sinners' (Mark 2.17; cf. 9.37), he was not excluding the righteous from his community (nor asserting that none are righteous), but accentuating his mission to the wayward. Similarly, the prophet Hosea's declaration, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice' (Hos 6.6), emphasizes mercy *over* sacrifice;<sup>322</sup> abolishment of the Temple cult obviously does not accord with the prophet's intention.<sup>323</sup> Thus, the original form of 7.15 was an 'antithetical hyperbole',<sup>324</sup> meaning in essence: 'A man is not so much defiled by that which enters him from outside as he is by that which comes from within'.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> See Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 28.

<sup>319</sup> Wright, *Jesus*, 398; cf. Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 220.

<sup>320</sup> See Harvey, *Constraints*, 40; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.178.

<sup>321</sup> See Dunn, *Law*, 51; Meier, *Law and Love*, 386; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 453; H. Räisänen, 'Jesus and the Food Laws: Reflections on Mark 7.15', *JSNT* 16 (1982), 79-100, citing 82; Klawans, *Impurity*, 146-49; Holmén, *Covenant Thinking*, 241.

<sup>322</sup> Cf. Exod 16.8; 1 Sam 8.7; Jer 7.22-23; Acts 5.4; *Let. Aris.* 234.

<sup>323</sup> Holmén, *Covenant Thinking*, 241.

<sup>324</sup> Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 95; cf. 28.

<sup>325</sup> S. Westerholm, *Jesus and Scribal Authority*, ConBNT 10 (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1978), 83.



Although this interpretation does resolve the discordance between Jesus and the Torah, it presents several weaknesses. First, the beginning of the saying, ‘*nothing* [οὐδέν] outside the man’<sup>326</sup> does not reflect the typical formula of ‘not . . . but’.<sup>327</sup> Second, the explanation Jesus gives to his disciples (vv. 18-23) does not give the impression of exaggerated speech, but states as a matter of fact that ‘*everything* from outside entering . . . is *not able* to defile him’ (v. 18, emphasis mine).<sup>328</sup> Third, Jesus does not address the Pharisees’ question. One may argue that Jesus lifts the discussion to a higher plane,<sup>329</sup> but Matthew’s understanding of the saying, albeit modified, concludes that Jesus does indeed counter the Pharisaic *halakha* of hand-washing (Matt 15.20). Furthermore, the disciples refer to 7.15 as a ‘parable’ (παροβολή, v. 17), which implies there is much more at play than mere rhetorical hyperbole.

While most scholars have understood 7.15 as a proverbial saying or riddle rather than a parabolic teaching,<sup>330</sup> the evidence is in favour of the latter. In Mark, a παροβολή always refers to a comparative story or illustration.<sup>331</sup> In addition, there are numerous similarities found in vv. 14-23 and in other Markan passages that involve parables: (1) Jesus summons the crowd (v. 13; cf. 3.23); (2) Jesus prepares his audience with the words, ‘Hear me, all of you, and understand’ (v. 14; cf. 4.3, 9, 12); (3) he concludes with the challenge, ‘If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear’ (v. 16, NASB; cf. 4.9, 23);<sup>332</sup> (4) Jesus explains the meaning in private (vv. 17-23; cf. 4.13-20, 34); and (5) Jesus chides them for failing to grasp the deeper lesson (v. 18; cf. 8.17; 4.12). Thus, Jesus intends his statement in 7.15 to be a parable, and the structure of Mark 7.14-23 reinforces this context.

This classification of 7.15 changes our approach to the text, for there are two layers of meaning we must decipher. As with every parable in Mark, ‘it contains a meaning beyond the literal one’.<sup>333</sup> Thus, before we contemplate the deeper explanation given by

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<sup>326</sup> NASB, emphasis mine.

<sup>327</sup> Matt 15.11 is closer to this formula.

<sup>328</sup> Translation mine.

<sup>329</sup> Banks, *Law*, 140.

<sup>330</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 355: ‘an enigmatic or riddling saying’; Dunn, *Law*, 42; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 455; Chilton and Neusner, *Judaism*, 122-24; Guelich, *Mark*, 208-09, 376-77; Harvey, *Constraints*, 39; W.L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 255. Wright, *Jesus*, 396-98, refers to it as a ‘cryptic saying’ that enabled Jesus to dispense with dietary laws secretly without instigating a riot. According to R.K. Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior*, Vol. 1 (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1989), 167, the identification of 7.15 as a parable was due to a misunderstanding of the disciples, who were not able to receive a ‘straightforward’ teaching.

<sup>331</sup> Mark 3.23; 4.2, 10, 11, 13, 30, 33, 34; 12.1, 12; 13.28.

<sup>332</sup> This phrase is omitted in many early MSS.

<sup>333</sup> Holmén, *Covenant Thinking*, 244.

Jesus in vv. 18-23, we must ask the preliminary question: What is a *literal* understanding of 7.15? The complexity surrounding first-century purity laws, however, often makes something formerly seen as self-evident unrecognizable to modern exegetes. As a point of comparison, if one is unacquainted with basic horticulture, one may likely fail to understand how Jesus' illustration of the fig tree (13.28)—a similar 'parable' in regard to its brevity—relates to eschatology in the Olivet Discourse. Familiarization with purity laws, as well as the context of the pericope, is therefore critical.

There is no question that 7.15a and 7.15b are in antithetical parallelism. If not hyperbole, what purpose does this contrast serve? By juxtaposing that which *enters* vis-à-vis that which *exits*, Jesus underscores the *direction* that defilement travels:

7.15a: οὐδέν ἐστιν ἔξωθεν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἰσπορευόμενον εἰς αὐτὸν ὃ δύναται κοινῶσαι αὐτόν·

7.15b: ἀλλὰ τὰ ἐκ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκπορευόμενά ἐστιν τὰ κοινοῦντα τὸν ἄνθρωπον.

7.15a: Nothing is there outside the man entering him that can defile him,

7.15b: but the things proceeding out of the man are the things defiling the man.<sup>334</sup>

Using this technique, Jesus sums up his position on impurity to the crowd. What 7.15a represents then is Jesus' opposition to the *halakha* of the Pharisees who have attempted to shame him. Their assertion that eating with unwashed hands transfers defilement internally he declares illegitimate. This Jesus contrasts with 7.15b, the biblical position of ritual defilement. The wording he uses is a clear allusion to the purity laws given in Leviticus 15, specifically v. 16, which refers to bodily emissions like semen that 'proceed out' from a man (מִנּוּ) and render him 'defiled' (טָמֵא).<sup>335</sup> Thus, Jesus is correcting the view of the Pharisees by virtually quoting the Torah. Israeli scholar Yair Furstenberg rephrases Jesus' rebuttal this way: 'Contrary to your *halakhah*, which is unknown in the bible, the

<sup>334</sup> Translation mine.

<sup>335</sup> Loader, *Attitude*, 75-76 n. 139: 'At one level it functions as an argument, literally, that bodily emissions are a greater purity issue than eating contaminated food, which, with regard to the written law, was indeed the case'; C. Stettler, 'Purity of Heart in Jesus' Teaching: Mark 7:14-23 par. as an Expression of Jesus' Basileia Ethics', *JTS* 55 (2004), 467-502, citing 474; R. Booth, *Jesus and the Laws of Purity: Tradition History and Legal History in Mark 7*, JSNTSup 13 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 209. The relationship of Mark 7.15 and Lev 15.16 was recognized by a group of influential Egyptian theologians in the fourth century. See Svartvik, *Mark and Mission*, 182-84. Svartvik posits that the Matthean parallel (Matt 15.11) that includes 'the mouth' is incompatible with this view. However, it is possible that στόμα is playful rhetoric referring to the mouth and orifices in general. Interestingly, G. Salyer, 'Rhetoric, Purity, and Play: Aspects of Mark 7:1-23', *Semeia* 64 (1993), 139-69, citing 160, notes the importance of orifices in purity systems, identifying their role as 'entrances and exits' of the human body.

body is not defiled by eating contaminated food. Rather, it is defiled by what comes out of it'.<sup>336</sup> This constitutes a literal understanding of 7.15, which remains consistent with the repeated antithesis in Jesus' overall argument: the 'tradition of the elders' (7.15a) versus the 'word of God' (7.15b).

Jesus, however, draws his audience to hear a deeper truth. In other Markan parables such as the fig tree (13.28) and the mustard seed (4.30-32), Jesus draws upon the laws of *nature*; in this occurrence, he uses the laws of *purity*. A similar approach may be observed by his illustration concerning the inner and outer purity of vessels (Matt 23.25-26; Luke 11.39-41)—a *halakhic* issue debated among the Pharisees<sup>337</sup>—which he uses to teach about the precedence of moral purity from within.<sup>338</sup> This metaphorical use of law was no foreign concept to Jewish ears. The parallel of ritual and moral purity is evident in early Jewish sources;<sup>339</sup> Philo, for example, draws spiritual meanings from Levitical purification rites without negating the literal sense of the text.<sup>340</sup> Thus, 'in Judaism', observes Marcus, 'spiritualization and literal observance can go hand in hand'.<sup>341</sup> Scripture itself uses the motif of purity in numerous passages, associating defilement with Israel's wickedness (e.g., Isa 64.5; Ezek 36.17) and using ritual cleansing as a metaphor for forgiveness (Ps 51.2, 7; Ezek 36.25).<sup>342</sup> Jesus likewise utilizes the Torah's concept of ritual impurity to draw a spiritual principle: A man can only contaminate himself by bodily discharges (blood, semen, and gonorrhoea), which are analogous to the impurities of the heart from which flow all evil thoughts and deeds that render a person immoral (vv. 20-23).

Perhaps the greatest exegetical challenge of the pericope is the short phrase, καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα, which follows Jesus' argument of why food cannot defile: 'Because it does not enter into his heart, but into the belly, and goes out into the latrine, *cleansing all foods*' (7.19).<sup>343</sup> The disputed clause 'hangs awkwardly without obvious syntactical connection' due to the fact that there is no referent of the participle

<sup>336</sup> Furstenberg, 'Defilement', 184.

<sup>337</sup> See *m. Kelim* 25.7-8; 25.1; *t. Ber.* 5.26.

<sup>338</sup> Cf. Saldarini, *Community*, 139-40; Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus*, 87; Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 39.

<sup>339</sup> Philo, *Spec. Laws* 1.256-61; *Let. Aris.* 142-43; 305-06; CD 2.1; 3.17.

<sup>340</sup> E.g., Philo, *Spec. Laws* 1.118; *Dreams* 1.81.

<sup>341</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 453. Cf. H. Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (ed. R.O. Zorn, tr. H. de Jongste; Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1962), 301-02; Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law*, 10: 'Ritual and moral purity must go in tandem, as Qumran and other Jewish renewal movements insisted at this time (e.g. 1QS 3.2-12; *As. Mos.* 7.7-9)'.

<sup>342</sup> See Klawans, *Impurity*, 32-36.

<sup>343</sup> Translation and emphasis mine.

καθαρίζων in close proximity.<sup>344</sup> Most modern scholars follow the interpretation of Origen, Gregory Thaumaturgus (a pupil of Origen), and Chrysostom that links καθαρίζων with the subject of λέγει (v. 18a).<sup>345</sup> According to this reading, Jesus is the one cleansing, or rather, authoritatively ‘declaring clean’ (cf. Lev 13.6, 13, 17 [LXX]) all food. Virtually all translations render the phrase as a parenthetical comment by the Evangelist and smoothen the awkward construction by altering the participle and adding words (e.g., ‘*Thus he declared all foods clean*’).<sup>346</sup> Mark’s explanation ‘interprets Jesus as having effectively annulled the Levitical food laws’,<sup>347</sup> changing the discussion from ‘food contaminated by unwashed hands to food itself’.<sup>348</sup> Dunn asserts that if the saying attributed to Jesus in 7.15 is indeed authentic, then Mark’s conclusion is ‘sound’; Jesus himself instigated ‘the breach with Judaism’, not the Evangelist.<sup>349</sup> Moreover, such a revolutionary message leaves the entire purity system and the Temple cult in question. Far too often, however, this interpretation of the phrase is taken as fact without acknowledging that ‘numerous possible explanations of Mk. 7.19’ exist.<sup>350</sup>

Although most contend that the parenthetical aside was intended for a Gentile audience, there are many scholars who seek to distinguish between Mark’s aim and Jesus’ original intention.<sup>351</sup> Sanders, for example, concludes that 7.19b ‘represents a possible interpretation of Jesus’ words, but not a necessary one’.<sup>352</sup> A similar perspective understands the phrase not as an abrogation of Torah, but rather serves as a reminder for Gentiles that food is not inherently pure or impure (cf. Rom 14.14, 20). Since it is only impure for those to whom the commandment was given (Jews), Mark is affirming the Apostolic Decree and Gentile freedom from full Torah observance (cf. Acts 15.1-35).<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 378.

<sup>345</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 378; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 455; Gundry, *Mark*, 367-68; Stein, *Mark*, 345; Banks, *Law*, 145; Holmén, *Covenant Thinking*, 244; C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St Mark* (Cambridge: CUP, 1972), 241.

<sup>346</sup> ESV, emphasis mine.

<sup>347</sup> Moo, ‘Mosaic Law’, 15.

<sup>348</sup> Loader, *Attitude*, 76.

<sup>349</sup> Dunn, *Law*, 38; cf. Moo, ‘Mosaic Law’, 15. Loader, *Attitude*, 77, also contends that ‘7:19c is drawing a correct conclusion from the context’, which he deems to be the abolishment of food laws.

<sup>350</sup> Harvey, *Constraints*, 40 n. 17.

<sup>351</sup> Saldarini, *Community*, 134; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 458; Sanders, *Jesus*, 266; Harvey, *Constraints*, 39; Levine, *Misunderstood Jew*, 25; Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law*, 10-11.

<sup>352</sup> E.P. Sanders, ‘Jesus and the First Table of the Jewish Law’ in J.D.G. Dunn and S. McKnight (eds), *The Historical Jesus in Recent Research*, SBTS 10 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 225-237, citing 235.

<sup>353</sup> See D.J. Rudolph, ‘Jesus and the Dietary Laws: A Reassessment of Mark 7:19b’, *EQ* 74 (2002), 291-311, citing 302-05; M.S. Kinzer, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 54-58.

According to Bird, the phrase coheres with Romans 14.14, 20 and thus represents ‘Pauline halakhah’.<sup>354</sup> Banks notes a similar context to that of Romans and 1 Corinthians, but concludes that 7.19b addresses a greater controversy involving idol food, not *kashrut*.<sup>355</sup>

If 7.19b is in fact an editorial comment, another possibility exists. The Evangelist might simply be confirming that *permitted* food is ritually clean in contrast to Pharisaic *halakha*.<sup>356</sup> In this approach, ‘all’ (πάντα; cf. vv. 18, 23) food should not be taken as though Jesus was referring to all kinds of food.<sup>357</sup> After all, unpermitted meat was not readily available in first-century Palestine, and it was repulsive to Jewish sensibilities. If this was Mark’s explanation, such an inference seems reasonable considering the original nature of the controversy, as opposed to a logical leap to endorsing non-kosher food. Moreover, this interpretation accords with the conclusion made by the Matthean Jesus (Matt 15.20) and removes the glaring inconsistency in Jesus’ argument.

As many have wondered, why would Jesus repeatedly castigate the Pharisees for setting aside the Torah, only to be guilty of the same error?<sup>358</sup> Gundry attempts to remove this obstacle by arguing that Jesus can simply ‘change the commandments because he is divine and the elders are not’.<sup>359</sup> This claim is hardly tenable, for Jesus says nothing of the sort; if anything, he underscores the authority of Moses (v. 10), not himself. Jesus’ argument bears no relation to his exalted spiritual status or even the kingdom of heaven. On the contrary, the basis of his reasoning is bodily function and the underworld of excrement. This poses a further problem—if Jesus’ aim were to abolish ceremonial barriers between Jew and Gentile in light of the eschatological kingdom, why would he make an appeal to digestion and elimination? Such an argument—that all food passes through a person—forms an appeal to natural bodily processes, something that has always been true. This would imply that all foods have *always* been clean and consequently the Mosaic dietary

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<sup>354</sup> M.F. Bird, ‘Mark: Interpreter of Peter and Disciple of Paul’ in M.F. Bird and J. Willitts (eds), *Paul and the Gospels: Christologies, Conflicts, and Convergences*, LNTS 411 (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 30-61, citing 50. Cf. Dunn, *Law*, 49-50.

<sup>355</sup> See Banks, *Law*, 144-45; Harvey, *Constraints*, 39-40. Loader, *Attitude*, 78 n. 148, finds this interpretation ‘too limiting’.

<sup>356</sup> See J.G. Crossley, ‘Mark 7.1-23: Revisiting the Question of “All Foods Clean”’ in M. Tait and P. Oakes (eds), *Torah in the New Testament: Papers Delivered at the Manchester-Lausanne Seminar of June 2008* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 8-20, citing 8, 16; Tomson, ‘Food Laws’, 206; Boyarin, *Jewish Gospels*, 121. This perspective is evident in the CJB translation: ‘Thus he declared all foods ritually clean.’

<sup>357</sup> Cf. πάν βρωμα in Sir 36.20(18).

<sup>358</sup> See Rudolph, ‘Dietary Laws’, 295; Svartvik, *Mark and Misson*, 6.

<sup>359</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 356.

laws were never legitimate in the first place.<sup>360</sup> Stein recognizes this difficulty and poses an exegetical solution: ‘Jesus’s words here must be interpreted in the context of the entire Gospel of Mark’.<sup>361</sup> He then postulates that Jesus must have terminated the OT dietary regulations since his overall message proclaimed the eschatological kingdom of God. A broader scope of Mark’s narrative, however, ‘shows clearly that Jesus does not abolish all the ritual laws of purification in such a rather casual way’.<sup>362</sup> It seems more logical to deduce that Jesus accepted the validity of all the Torah, and that he believed his instruction in Mark 7 was consistent with that revelation.

Taking this point into consideration, of all the possible interpretations of 7.19b above, only the view that Jesus declares all permitted food ritually clean makes the best sense. There is, however, another ancient view that regards the phrase as a continuation of Jesus’ words, rather than an editorial remark. As Flusser observes:

The overwhelming majority of modern translators thoughtlessly accept Origen’s interpretation when they take Mark 7:19b to mean ‘Thus he declared all foods clean,’ although the Greek original can hardly be read in this sense.<sup>363</sup>

While Flusser may be overstating his case, he is correct that the typical rendering of 7.19b places great strain on the text.<sup>364</sup> Grammatical issues aside, it seems the most natural reading would take the ‘cleansing’ as simply a further description of the elimination of food.<sup>365</sup> This is evident in later manuscripts that have the neuter καθαρίζον instead of the well-attested masculine καθαρίζων.<sup>366</sup> Regardless of whether this was the result of scribal error or a deliberate redaction of the text during the Byzantine period, this position cannot be relegated to a later development. In the mid-third century CE—virtually the same time Origen composed his *Commentary on Matthew* arguing that Jesus ‘cleansed’ all food—another theologian, the Roman presbyter Novatian, presented a very different interpretation: ‘God is worshipped by neither belly nor foods, which the Lord says [will]

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<sup>360</sup> See Loader, *Attitude*, 85.

<sup>361</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 345.

<sup>362</sup> Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, 300.

<sup>363</sup> Flusser, ‘Context of History’, 225.

<sup>364</sup> P.J. Tomson, “*If this be from Heaven . . .*”: *Jesus and the New Testament Authors in Their Relationship to Judaism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 260-61.

<sup>365</sup> See Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, 332 n. 35.

<sup>366</sup> See B.M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1975), 95.

perish and are *purged by natural law in the privy*’ (*De cibis Iudaicis* 5.9).<sup>367</sup> This reading is not only evident in Jerome’s Latin Vulgate but also in Syriac traditions, such as the *Diatessaron* and the Old Syriac Gospels. One notable example of 7.19 from the Sinaitic Syriac was popularized Black (*An Aramaic Approach*): ‘. . . for it enters not his heart but his belly, *all the food being cast out and purged away*’.<sup>368</sup> Commenting on the same tradition, Vermes highlights the playful pun between ‘latrine’ (*dukha*) and the verb ‘to purge’ (*dekha*) that perhaps the translator perceived was underlying the Greek text.<sup>369</sup>

Some scholars have accepted the textual variant of καθαρίζον over the masculine form.<sup>370</sup> The evidence that scribes frequently interchanged omicron and omega vowels lends some credence to this position.<sup>371</sup> Others prefer καθαρίζων, but argue that the incongruity of the participle with the preceding clause, εἰς τὸν ἀφεδρωῶνα ἐκπορεύεται, has been unduly emphasized since there are many examples of dangling participles in the NT.<sup>372</sup> Robertson, for example, identifies the construction as an *anacoluthon*, ‘common to all stages of the Greek language’.<sup>373</sup> If this is the correct understanding of the participle, it forms a more difficult reading, which may lend more credence to its authenticity.

There are, however, other factors to consider. Since ‘all reading in the Graeco-Roman world was done aloud’, perhaps we must ask the question, how would someone *hear* vv. 18-19?<sup>374</sup> In Koine Greek, the omicron and omega shared the same

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<sup>367</sup> Trans. by Svartvik, *Mark and Mission*, 180; emphasis mine. This important fact appears to be virtually absent in all treatments of Mark 7.19b, perhaps because the composition is in Latin and thus the relationship between *purgo* and καθαρίζω is not readily recognized.

<sup>368</sup> M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 217; emphasis original.

<sup>369</sup> Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 29.

<sup>370</sup> B.J. Malina, ‘A Conflict Approach to Mark 7’, *Foundations & Facets Forum* 4.3 (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1988), 3-30, citing 22-23; J.D.M. Derrett, ‘Marco vii. 15-23: il vero significato di “purificare”’ in *Studies in the New Testament: Vol. I, Glimpses of the Legal and Social Presuppositions of the Authors* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 176-183; W.C. Kaiser, Jr., *Tough Questions About God and His Actions in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2015), 163-65.

<sup>371</sup> This common scribal mistake is mentioned in D.A. Black, *New Testament Textual Criticism: A Concise Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 16-17.

<sup>372</sup> M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek: Illustrated by Examples* (tr. J.P. Smith; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963), 5-6; F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (tr. R.W. Funk; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 76; A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1914), 1130; R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Mark’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1961), 297-98.

<sup>373</sup> A.T. Robertson and W.H. Davis, *A New Short Grammar of the Greek Testament: For Students Familiar with the Elements of Greek* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1933), 203.

<sup>374</sup> M.A. Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark’s World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 44.

pronunciation;<sup>375</sup> if Mark intended Jesus to be the subject, he failed to make this point audibly clear. As Guelich rightly observes, the grammatical construction ‘fails to follow the normal pattern of the evangelist’s parenthetical comments’.<sup>376</sup> Furthermore, the verb καθαρίζω carried different meanings depending on the context. Cleansing a person of leprosy by the power of God meant one thing (Mark 1.40-45); cleansing with regard to defecation meant something else entirely.<sup>377</sup> A discussion centred on the latter would likely lead the hearer to conclude that Jesus was referring to bodily elimination of foods without any noticeable break in the dialogue.

Notwithstanding the overwhelming endorsement the Markan parenthetical view has received by modern scholarship, it did not receive universal support by early Christian theologians. At the very least, the ancient view that attributes the phrase to Jesus remains a legitimate possibility to be considered. This means that there are at least two plausible interpretations of 7.19b that retain continuity between Jesus and the dietary laws of the Torah: (1) the phrase can be understood as a Markan comment that all permitted foods are clean, rendering the rite of hand-washing redundant, or (2) the phrase should be taken as a continuation of Jesus’ explanation about the bodily elimination of food. It seems reasonable, therefore, to avoid the tendency of many scholars to draw drastic conclusions from an awkward (and perhaps anomalous) syntactical construction.

In summary, Jesus’ discourse in Mark 7.6-23 accords with Scripture on two levels. First, it endorses the Torah’s view of self-defilement, in contrast to the Pharisaic *halakha* that unwashed hands imputed ritual defilement to bread, and thus to the body. Jesus’ allusion to Leviticus 15 in his parabolic teaching is therefore indicative of his adherence to the purity code. Second, the spiritual lesson Jesus extrapolates from this code resembles the metaphorical use of ritual defilement found in prophetic literature. Jesus, like the prophets, teaches in this manner to stress the need for moral holiness. In this regard it seems reasonable to conclude that Jesus relativizes the importance of external purity, but this misses the point: Jesus does not contrast ‘rite and right’ as Neusner asserts,<sup>378</sup> but *Torah*

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<sup>375</sup> See A.J. Köstenberger, B.L. Merkle, R.L. Plummer, *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek: An Intermediate Study of the Grammar and Syntax of the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 24.

<sup>376</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 378-79.

<sup>377</sup> For example, Diogenes the Cynic speaks of passing unclean food (‘I will purge it’, αὐτὴν καθαροῶ) in *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* 6.61.

<sup>378</sup> Neusner, *Rabbi Talks*, 137; Chilton and Neusner, *Judaism*, 151.



*with tradition*. Contrary to the innovative teaching of the Pharisees, Jesus' teaching reflects a conservative tendency to safeguard the divinely inspired Torah against human alteration.

### 3.4 Temple (Mark 11.15-18)

Without question, Jesus' most explosive conflict with his contemporaries was the public disturbance he instigated preceding the annual festival of Passover—a time when Jerusalem's population swelled considerably, generating a surge in Temple revenue. Unlike the two previous controversies that involve the Pharisees, the so-called 'Cleansing of the Temple' (Mark 11.15-18) was a direct assault against the moneychangers and merchants conducting their commercial activities in the outer courtyard. By upsetting their tables and driving out both sellers and buyers, Jesus sent a seditious message that consequently led to his arrest and crucifixion by the priestly aristocracy.<sup>379</sup>

Scholars have frequently noted that the traditional designation is somewhat of a misnomer.<sup>380</sup> While 'cleansing' may appropriately refer to Jesus ridding the Temple of improper activity, it can also imply that he ritually purified the Temple grounds, a duty reserved for the priesthood only. Of course, a more appropriate title is a matter of debate and depends upon what one identifies as Jesus' main objective. Although numerous interpretations have been proposed, scholars are largely divided as to whether Jesus' demonstration represents a noble stand for justice and reform, as commonly understood, or some sort of symbolic enactment.

In support of the latter, Sanders regards Jesus' actions as 'a gesture intended to make a point rather than to have a concrete result'.<sup>381</sup> The intended effect of overturning tables was not to prevent coin exchange for the Temple tax—a necessary convenience for pilgrims—but served as a visual display of destruction. In this view, contrary to most scholarly opinions, Jesus' lively demonstration was void of any criticism against the priestly establishment or cult practises. Thus, he expressed no desire to purify the Temple

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<sup>379</sup> Sanders, *Jesus*, 294-318; P.M. Casey, 'Culture and Historicity: The Cleansing of the Temple', *CBQ* 59.2 (1997), 306-332, citing 332.

<sup>380</sup> R. Bauckham, 'Jesus' Demonstration in the Temple', in *Law and Religion*, 72-89, citing 72; R.A. Horsley, *Covenant Economics: A Biblical Vision of Justice for All* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 128. Chilton prefers the designation 'occupation' of the Temple. See B.D. Chilton, 'Jesus' Dispute in the Temple and the Origin of the Eucharist', *Dialogue* 29.4 (1996), 17-28, citing 21.

<sup>381</sup> Sanders, *Jesus*, 70.

whatsoever, nor did he object to the sacrificial requirements of the Torah.<sup>382</sup> Rather, Jesus' aim was to announce the end of the age and the passing away of the Herodian Temple, which he may have threatened to destroy himself, in order to make way for a more perfect and holy sanctuary from heaven.<sup>383</sup>

Sanders' analysis of this episode seems inconsistent with his portrait of Jesus as a prophet. With regard to the destruction of the First Temple, the prophets of Israel did not merely utter predictions; they denounced the priestly aristocracy for their corrupt and immoral practises. Bird rightly observes: 'A belief in the destruction of the temple without an accompanying judgment would be an anomaly in Jewish literature.'<sup>384</sup> As Sanders himself recognizes, if Jesus' aim were to solely forecast the end of the cult, the smashing of a clay pot (cf. Jer. 19.10) would be more representative of destruction than upsetting tables.<sup>385</sup> Such activity, in combination with driving people out of the Temple premises, is indicative of anger, and anger implies judgement.

The clearest evidence that Jesus' actions entailed a prophetic rebuke is found in Mark 11.17, which Sanders and other scholars such as Harvey regard as inauthentic.<sup>386</sup> This is an unfortunate mistake, for the teaching attributed to Jesus here is the hermeneutical key to understanding Jesus' action in the Temple. By quoting and contrasting Isaiah 56.7 ('My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations') with Jeremiah 7.11 ('a den of robbers'), Jesus employs antithetical parallelism. The purpose of this rhetorical device is unmistakable: Jesus is expressing his clear disapproval of what the Temple had become in light of what it was intended to be. This, however, supports understanding Jesus' demonstration as a 'prophetic protest' against Temple practise, as opposed to prophetic symbolism.<sup>387</sup>

In further support of the symbolic approach, scholars usually note the motif of judgement present in four main events from the wider narrative: (1) Mark's placement of the Temple incident between the cursing and withering of the fig tree narrative (11.12-14, 20-21) may indicate a common theme. If by cursing the fruitless tree, Jesus alludes to the impending destruction of Israel, then his actions in the Temple may constitute another

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<sup>382</sup> Sanders, *Jesus*, 75, acknowledges that Mark 11.17 clearly implies that Jesus was 'protesting against dishonesty', but attributes this relationship to the redaction of Mark.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>384</sup> M.F. Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission*, LNTS 331 (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 150.

<sup>385</sup> Sanders, *Jesus*, 70.

<sup>386</sup> Sanders, *Jesus*, 66; Harvey, *Constraints*, 132. Contra Bockmuehl, *This Jesus*, 73.

<sup>387</sup> Bauckham, 'Jesus' Demonstration', 72; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 650.

‘acted parable’.<sup>388</sup> (2) The subject of judgement is also evident in the parable of the vineyard tenants (12.1-12), although it is not directed at the Temple *per se*, but the priests, scribes, and elders who governed it (11.27). (3) Jesus also prophesies the fall of the Temple structure (13.1-2) in jarring contrast to the words of admiration uttered by one of his disciples. (4) Lastly, during his trial before the Sanhedrin, a false testimony against Jesus records him saying, ‘I will *destroy* this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will *build another*, not made with hands’ (14.58).<sup>389</sup>

Although these events from Mark 11-14 are important to consider, we should avoid the tendency to harmonize the varied contents therein into one Temple-oriented theme. Loader, for example, interprets these chapters as though Mark’s main objective is ‘to present Jesus as the one who replaces the temple condemned by God’.<sup>390</sup> Whether it be Jesus’ instruction on prayer (11.20-25) or his pleasant interaction with a scribe (12.28-34), the replacement of the Temple is apparently always in view. If this is correct, then Mark would have us believe the allegations in 14.58 are essentially true—Jesus not only sought the Temple’s demise, but planned to substitute it with something else. According to Wright, the Temple forms another ‘nationalistic symbol’ of Jewish identity that Jesus challenges and redefines.<sup>391</sup> Agreeing with Sanders’ basic premise—that the Temple incident as a sign of destruction points toward restoration—Wright posits that Jesus claimed he himself had become the new Temple and his body the new sacrifice.<sup>392</sup> Thus, it is the institution of the Eucharist that completes what Jesus begins with an overturned table; as both events form a coherent whole, ‘The two interpret one another’.<sup>393</sup> Neusner and Chilton hold similar positions but centre on Jesus threatening the Temple establishment by making ‘his meals into a rival altar’.<sup>394</sup>

Despite all these arguments presented, there is no clear indication that Mark presents the Temple incident as a dramatic symbol of destruction, or that it additionally intimated a replacement of the Temple and cult. The cursing of the fig tree may imply that judgement was coming upon Israel for her lack of godly fruit, but it is hardly representative of the Temple. Although it is certainly possible that Mark sandwiches the Temple episode

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<sup>388</sup> Wright, *Jesus*, 421.

<sup>389</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>390</sup> Loader, *Attitude*, 116.

<sup>391</sup> Wright, *Jesus*, 390.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 426, 557-58.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, 557.

<sup>394</sup> Chilton and Neusner, *Comparing Spiritualities*, 122; Chilton, ‘Jesus’ Dispute’, 25-28.

in between both parts of the fig tree narrative to make such an association, the second half of the story (11.20-25) appears to be more a lesson on the power of prayer, including faith and forgiveness, rather than simply judgement. As already noted, the parable of the vineyard tenants refers to the condemnation and replacement of the Temple authorities (12.9), rather than the actual Temple itself.

While it is certain that Mark presents Jesus prophesying the impending doom of the Temple (13.1-2), nothing in the Synoptic tradition suggests Jesus threatened to destroy it himself or change the regulations given through Moses. Drawing anything from the false charge levied against Jesus (14.58) is not only shaky exegesis, but ignores the critical fact that it is multiply attested to be scornful and spurious testimony (Mark 15.29; Matt. 26.59-61; 27.40; Acts 6.13-14).<sup>395</sup> Concerning messianic expectation, Evans notes that ‘there is no clear evidence that would suggest that the Messiah . . . would destroy the temple’.<sup>396</sup> Furthermore, there is no obvious link between the Temple incident and Jesus’ final meal, which was symbolically associated with the Passover. The fact that the disciples continued to worship and congregate in the Temple courts long after this event counters the assertion that they believed Jesus had replaced the Temple, either with himself or his community.

When we consider Jesus’ statement in Mark 11.17 and how it relates to his behaviour (vv. 15-16), there is clearly *something* that angers Jesus, some Temple-related activity (or activities) that both ‘his teaching’ (v. 18) and demonstration form a coherent stand against. For Borg, it functions as ‘a protest against the temple as the center of a purity system that was also a system of economic and political oppression’,<sup>397</sup> while for Crossan, an explosive reaction to ‘the seat and symbol of everything that was nonegalitarian, patronal, and even oppressive on both the religious and the political level’.<sup>398</sup> In v. 17, however, Jesus’ words do not allow for his demonstration to represent something only *he* opposes. As already mentioned, Jesus thematically links and juxtaposes two verses (Isa 56.7; Jer 7.11) that highlight the ‘house’ of the Lord.<sup>399</sup> Yet, there is another noticeable contrast in Jesus’ rebuke. Here, as in Mark 7, Jesus accuses his hearers of contravening holy Scripture (‘Is it not written that . . . ?’). In this statement, however, it is not what they

<sup>395</sup> The closest saying that Jesus utters is found in John 2.19, but speaks of those who wish to destroy him.

<sup>396</sup> C.A. Evans, ‘Jesus’ Action in the Temple: Cleansing or Portent of Destruction?’, *CBQ* 51.2 (1989), 237-270, citing 249.

<sup>397</sup> M.J. Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1994), 116.

<sup>398</sup> Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 360.

<sup>399</sup> Jesus is likely using the interpretive method of *gezerah shavah*. See J. Marcus, *Mark 8-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 27A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 784.

say (cf. 7.11, ὑμεῖς δὲ λέγετε), but what they have *done* (11.17, ὑμεῖς δὲ πεποιθήκατε) that Jesus contrasts with God's word. Thus, Jesus cannot be protesting purity or sacrificial laws if he is calling the people back to the Torah and Prophets. This presupposes that the Markan Jesus adheres to Scripture himself and does not promote 'an abandonment of commitment to Torah' as Loader asserts.<sup>400</sup>

Jesus' quotation of Isaiah 56.7 is fairly straightforward in the sense that he is underscoring the role of the Temple as a sacred place for prayer. The obvious antithetical parallelism of 'house of prayer' and 'den of robbers' makes this clear. The difficulty of interpretation rather lies in the secondary phrase 'for all nations', which both Matthew and Luke oddly omit.<sup>401</sup> The context of Isaiah 56.1-8, of course, contains a very strong theme of the inclusion of the foreigner into the Israelite community. The prophet declares that God will even gather them to Mount Zion and accept their 'burnt offerings and sacrifices' on his altar (v. 56.7a). Although most Jews, and likely Jesus himself, may have regarded this passage as something destined for the eschatological Temple, Jesus appears to perceive the function of the Temple facilitating prayer for all people as something relevant and timeless. Indeed, Solomon recognized this very purpose in his dedicatory prayer of the First Temple (1 Kgs 8.41-43). Furthermore, if this central function of the temple was only reserved for a future age, Jesus' criticism would be pointless.<sup>402</sup> It seems reasonable, therefore, that Jesus understood Isaiah 56.7b as an imperative: 'My house *shall be called* a house of prayer for all the nations'.<sup>403</sup>

Instead of fostering this vision and preserving the sanctity of the Temple, they have turned it into a 'den of robbers'. Here Jesus alludes to Jeremiah 7.11, in which the Lord tells the prophet to stand at the Temple gate and reprimand the people of Israel for their covenantal infidelity. They commit acts of injustice (vv. 5-6) and violate the Decalogue (v. 9), yet continue to 'stand before' (i.e., pray before) God in the Temple, trusting in a false sense of security. The prophet then asks them the rhetorical question: 'Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?' The point is clearly to shame them—since they all congregate as wicked people, they have turned the Temple into a cave of criminals. As often noted by scholars, the prophet continues by prophesying the destruction of God's 'house' in which the people place their trust (vv. 12-15).

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<sup>400</sup> Loader, *Attitude*, 117.

<sup>401</sup> Matt 21.13; Luke 19.46.

<sup>402</sup> Bauckham, 'Jesus' Demonstration', 85.

<sup>403</sup> Emphasis mine.

Appealing to this contextual background, Holmén argues that Jesus did not believe his actions were purging the Temple of something unholy and corrupt, since the Temple was no longer sacred ground. Instead, the pejorative expression in the context of Jeremiah 7 implies destruction, which explains Jesus' symbolic demonstration and his desire for the sacrificial system to completely cease.<sup>404</sup> Thus, Jesus' posture towards the Temple was marked by both frustration and indifference; he viewed the sacrificial system as 'meaningless' worship, rapidly approaching abolishment.<sup>405</sup> This leads Holmén to conclude that 'the Temple and its cult did not for Jesus function as a covenant path marker', since he was not interested in upholding such covenant activities.<sup>406</sup> These assertions seem untenable, for not only is Holmén's depiction of Jesus at odds with the Synoptic tradition (see below), but he omits a relevant piece of information in his assessment of Jeremiah 7.11, in which God commands the prophet to tell the people, 'Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place' (7.3). Thus, the call for reform is equally evident in the narrative as the threat of destruction.

As further evidence that Jesus opposed the Temple as an apostate institution, many scholars have argued for a different meaning of the phrase 'den of robbers'. Although the majority of translations render ληστῆς as simply 'robber' or 'thief', it more accurately refers to one who pillages, such as a pirate or bandit (cf. Luke 10.30). As often noted, however, Josephus applies the term to those engaged in insurrection or revolution (*War* 2.253-254; 6.129). This has led some scholars to suppose that Jesus was attacking the Temple as 'a center of nationalist resistance' that would eventually become a Zealot stronghold against Roman invasion.<sup>407</sup> Wright bolsters this claim by his generalization of first-century Palestinian Jews, especially the Pharisees, as warmongering and anti-Gentile. Such a characterization does not accord with early Jewish sources that presuppose the importance of ethnic inclusivity (e.g., Philo, *Moses* 2.44; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.103; *T. Sim.* 7.2; *T. Naph.* 8.3) and report the radical pacifist demonstrations of the Jews in the face of religious intolerance—even when the sanctity of the Temple was at stake (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.261-72; cf. *Ant.* 18.55-59). Contrary to the claims of Borg and Wright, this

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<sup>404</sup> Holmén, *Covenant Thinking*, 323-27; cf. Wright, *Jesus*, 419: 'Cleansing is not enough; what is required is destruction.'

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, 328-29.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

<sup>407</sup> M.J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness, and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (2nd edn; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1998), 188; cf. Bird, *Gentile Mission*, 150.

understanding of Jesus' demonstration seems highly unlikely. The most appropriate context of ληστῆς is Jeremiah 7 (LXX), rather than the revolutionary clashes recorded by Josephus. As we have already seen, this is a passage that centres not on nationalist violence or xenophobia, but general lawlessness.

An alternative approach to Mark 11.17 is to take the antithetical saying as primarily rhetorical and in the context of Jesus' actions in the Temple, rather than drawing too much from the diverse scriptural passages that Jesus quotes.<sup>408</sup> Considering its pejorative nature, there is no reason to take the word 'bandit' literally, any more than the Temple had become an actual 'cave'. Rather, it seems more reasonable to take this saying as a polemic attack on the Temple establishment—not concerning the biblical activities surrounding sacrifice, but the surge of commercialism overtaking sacred space.<sup>409</sup> This undoubtedly led to a degree of profiteering, hence the word 'robbers', that benefitted the Temple treasury rather than the worshippers that assembled. Not only is this a more natural reading of the text in relation to Jesus' actions against the moneychangers and merchants, it is also attested by the Johannine tradition which records Jesus as saying: 'Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade' (John 2.16). His action of preventing the carrying of 'merchandise' through the Temple (Mark 11.16) accords well with this approach.<sup>410</sup> Such commercial activity was likely an extension of the Temple service and may have been operated by Levites and priests themselves (cf. 2 Chr 24.5).<sup>411</sup> Therefore, a demonstration directed against this business would have placed Jesus in direct confrontation with the Temple authorities who sanctioned and administered such transaction in the Temple.

If this were the main purpose behind Jesus' protest, however, how does the phrase 'all nations' relate to his activity in the Temple? Although many have proposed that Jesus was countering discrimination, no action he performs signifies this, unless, of course, his demonstration took place in the court reserved for Gentiles, an important detail that Mark fails to mention. Contrary to popular usage, however, the outer court of the Temple where

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<sup>408</sup> Evans, 'Jesus' Action', 268.

<sup>409</sup> Trade played a necessary role in pilgrims' participation in the temple cult, but these markets were normally situated on the Mount of Olives. See J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation Into Economic and Social Conditions During the New Testament Period* (3rd edn; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 48.

<sup>410</sup> The word σκεῦος literally means a vessel and was perhaps used to transfer goods, such as oil and flour, that were used in offerings. According to Bauckham, 'Jesus' Demonstration', 78, Jesus' other action of driving out buyers refers to 'temple staff buying in supplies for the temple and merchants purchasing valuable items which people had donated to the temple'.

<sup>411</sup> Bauckham, 'Jesus' Demonstration', 73.

the merchants likely conducted their business was not known as the ‘Court of the Gentiles’ in antiquity.<sup>412</sup> This modern designation has tended to reinforce the idea that the Herodian Temple itself was repressive and non-inclusive, when in actuality the evidence suggests that ‘the Temple Jesus entered was already a house of prayer for all nations’.<sup>413</sup> Although Josephus identifies four courts of the Temple, each with their own set of restrictions, he describes the first this way: ‘The outer court was open to *all*, foreigners included’ (*Ag. Ap.* 2.103 [Thackeray, LCL]).<sup>414</sup> Therefore, the outer court served as a place of prayer for *everyone*, both Jew and Gentile, and that is precisely what made it unique. Therefore, Jesus’ emphasis lies in the fact that this court was sanctified as a place of prayer. This is probably the reason why ‘for all nations’ is omitted by Matthew and Luke—not because Jesus’ protest originally carried a Gentile-centred theme that they wished to suppress, but because they understood the phrase as supplementary to the phrase ‘house of prayer’ where the stress lay.<sup>415</sup>

Historically, the commercialization of the Second-Temple cult and corruption among its governing priests are well attested.<sup>416</sup> Concerning the former, a few passages from the Mishnah directly relate to Jesus’ actions against the moneychangers and those selling doves. According to *m. Sheq.* 1.3, the collectors of the Temple tax set up booths throughout Israel one month prior to Passover (15<sup>th</sup> of Adar). Ten days later, however, they moved them into the Temple precincts and began distraining on the goods of those who had not paid the half-shekel tax. If Rabbi Meir’s opinion is accurate, an eight percent surcharge fee was added for those who paid the tax with normal currency (*m. Sheq.* 1.7)—a very high figure indeed. Another tractate testifies to an apparent monopoly the Temple had on the sale of doves (*m. Ker.* 1.7), the most common offering and the sacrifice of the poor (Lev 5.7; 12.8). The impression that the religious leaders of the Temple were more concerned with business than spiritual matters is found in Targum Jeremiah: ‘both scribe and priest devote themselves to trade’ (*Tg. Jer* 14.18).<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Bird, *Gentile Mission*, 151; Bauckham, ‘Jesus’ Demonstration’, 85; Borg, *Conflict*, 187.

<sup>413</sup> A.J. Levine, ‘Matthew, Mark, and Luke: Good News or Bad?’ in P. Fredriksen and A. Reinhartz (eds), *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism: Reading the New Testament after the Holocaust* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 77-98, citing 85.

<sup>414</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>415</sup> Bauckham, ‘Jesus’ Demonstration’, 85.

<sup>416</sup> See Evans, *Contemporaries*, 319-44; idem, ‘Jesus’ Action’, 248-64; Bauckham, ‘Jesus’ Demonstration’, 75-80; Bockmuehl, *Jesus*, 69-74.

<sup>417</sup> Trans. by Evans, *Contemporaries*, 330.



Evans demonstrates that the overwhelming amount of evidence from early Jewish sources reveals that many Jews of differing traditions ‘viewed various priests, High Priests, or priestly families as wealthy, corrupt, often greedy, and sometimes violent’.<sup>418</sup> Josephus, for example, records how at times the priestly aristocracy resembled the mafia, taking bribes (*Ant.* 20.213) and sending their servants to forcefully exact tithes, ‘beating those who refused to give’ (*Ant.* 20.206). This accords with the memory preserved in a rabbinic lament against ‘violent men of the priesthood’ who would ‘take it by force’ and ‘beat [the people] with staves’ (*t. Menah.* 13.18-21).<sup>419</sup> In view of the above, it is no coincidence that various traditions depict the priests as ‘robbers’ (*Tg. Jer* 6.13; 7.9; 8.10) who live in opulence while criminally consuming the possessions of the poor (*T. Moses* 7.6; *CD* 6.15-17; *1QpHab* 8.12; 9.5; 10.1; 12.9-10). Considering this historical background, Jesus’ allusion to Jeremiah 7.11 (‘den of robbers’) could not have been more appropriate.

Jesus instigating a protest to fulfil messianic expectations of this period is certainly probable. Some Jews may have anticipated that an anointed leader would one day purge the Temple of traders, reprimand officials, and drive out the wicked (*Pss. Sol.* 17.26-42; 18.5-7; *Zech* 14.21). Far more conclusive, however, is Jesus’ high regard for the Temple in the Synoptics,<sup>420</sup> which would account for his courageous stand against impiety and greed. His zealous display of righteous anger should not be misconstrued as though Jesus was anti-Temple or opposed to sacrifice. If Jesus regarded the Temple as an apostate institution, devoid of meaning, he would not have continued teaching in the Temple courts for many days following the incident (*Mark* 14.49; cf. *Luke* 19.47). Furthermore, not only does Jesus’ charge to the leper in *Mark* 1.44 reveal his compliance with the laws of purity and sacrifice administered by the priesthood, but it remains highly probable that Mark intentionally places this statement before the controversies that follow to remove any doubt about Jesus’ adherence to Torah.<sup>421</sup>

In conclusion, Jesus’ Temple demonstration in no way represents hostility against the sacrificial system that Moses ordained for Israel. Neither does it reveal indifference or

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<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, 342.

<sup>419</sup> Trans. by J. Neusner, *The Tosefta: Translated from the Hebrew with a New Introduction*, Vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 1467-68.

<sup>420</sup> Cf. *Matt* 5.23-24; 23.16-22. Nowhere else is this theme more pronounced than in *Luke*, in which the Temple bookends the narrative (1.5-23; 24.52). This motif continues in *Acts*, where the church became centralized in Jerusalem, gathering daily together in the Temple (*Acts* 2.46; 5.42). See J.H. Charlesworth, ‘Jesus and the Temple’ in J.H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus and Temple: Textual and Archaeological Explorations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 145-81, citing 158-61; Ridderbos, *Kingdom*, 300-01.

<sup>421</sup> See Marcus, *Mark* 1-8, 210. Cf. *Luke* 17.14.

unconcern for Temple rites, but rather the opposite: his actions and words constitute a prophetic display of zeal for the holy place of God's dwelling. While the theory that Jesus intended his actions to be a proleptic sign of judgement is not at variance with his role as a prophet, it seems more probable that the episode is related to such a theme, rather than symbolic of judgement or destruction itself. Charlesworth posits, 'Jesus was defending the sanctity of the Temple, not seeking to abolish it'.<sup>422</sup> His creative juxtaposition of prophetic texts that he uses to counter unbiblical commercialization and profiteering not only displays a deep knowledge of Scripture, but a strong conviction to restore the central purpose of the Temple as a 'house of prayer' for everyone.

### 3.5 Conclusion

This analysis of three major controversies in Mark has shown that Jesus in no way abrogated the covenantal observances of Judaism pertaining to Sabbath, diet, purity, and Temple. In each instance, Jesus quotes or alludes to some OT passage, either from the Torah or Prophets, to substantiate his position. Such argumentation naturally presupposes commonality of Scripture and a general adherence to the same tradition. In none of the passages examined, however, does Jesus appeal to the *eschaton* or kingdom of heaven as the basis for his instruction. With the possible exception of the Temple incident, he also does not make any reference to Gentile mission. This is highly significant considering the fact that many have understood Jesus to have radically redefined or relaxed these Jewish identity markers in light of these things.

The stories themselves, however, present varied lines of reasoning. As regards the Sabbath, Jesus reprioritizes the observance in order to benefit human welfare—a message he gleans from the story of David and the showbread. Concerning his debate over handwashing customs, he counters the Pharisaic concept of hand impurity by defending the biblical pattern of defilement outlined in the book of Leviticus. In the boldest move of his ministry, Jesus quotes the Isaianic ideal of true Temple worship to justify his righteous display of reformist zeal.

A common thread that emerges is that in each case Jesus is presented as rightly representing Scripture; he defends truth and opposes traditions and practises that run

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<sup>422</sup> Charlesworth, *Jesus and Temple*, 162.

counter to Moses and the Prophets. These narratives of conflict, therefore, serve to preserve the inspired instruction of Jesus that was intended to rectify certain errors of Jewish practise. They do not, however, represent any kind of systematic abolishment of Jewish identity markers. Although Mark 7.1-23 has received considerable attention in scholarship, the debate does not appear as important in the Synoptic tradition (Luke, for example, makes no mention of it). This is largely because the subject matter was originally understood as having nothing to do with *kashrut*, but purity traditions of the elders. Therefore, of the three main observances of Judaism, Jesus is only accused of relaxing the Sabbath commandment. This means that if Mark intended to present some kind of coherent argument for the abolishment of Jewish identity markers, he was not successful. A closer examination of the debates, however, reveals that every controversy narrative was composed to have the opposite effect: Jesus illuminates the true will of God as revealed in the Torah and Prophets, thereby affirming and not annulling the Scriptures of Israel.

## Conclusion

As we have seen in this study, Torah observance was of central importance in the mission and teaching of Jesus. In continuum with the Hebrew Prophets and the ministry of John the Baptist, Jesus' message stressed the importance of *teshuvah*, especially in light of the kingdom of God. For Jesus to be considered a prophet by a large number of Jews within a devoutly observant cultural setting, he must have upheld the *whole* Torah, including those observances characteristic of Judaism. By underscoring 'weightier matters' of ethical obligations to one's neighbour, his message coheres beautifully with prophetic tradition. On the other hand, Jesus' hyperbolic illustration of the enduring *yod*, as well as his admonition to fulfil and not neglect even the 'least' *mitzvah* or minutia of ritual, is indicative of his impartial approach to Torah observance (Matt 5.18-19; 23.3; cf. Deut 8.1; Josh 23.6).

While scholars often contrast this 'conservative' outlook of the Matthean Jesus with the 'radical' Markan Jesus, our analysis of the controversies does not support the idea that such drastically diverse portraits exist in the Synoptic tradition. In all three accounts, the Markan Jesus conservatively appeals to Scripture in order to oppose practises or beliefs he deems at odds with the truth. He prioritizes human welfare over minor Sabbath-day regulation (concerning food of the field), defending the actions of his hungry disciples by referring to a story from 1 Samuel. In addition, he alludes to the creation account in Genesis, affirming the rightful place of the Sabbath as a God-ordained observance created to benefit humankind.

In the handwashing dispute, Jesus again deflects criticism directed at his followers, but with a purity parable (Mark 7.15) to contrast Pharisaic *halakha* with the Torah's view of self-defilement; he ingeniously utilizes a concept from Leviticus to teach a moral lesson, using rhetorical antithesis to make his instruction memorable. Taking this into consideration, Mark 7—the primary chapter frequently cited as evidence for Jesus' challenge to the Mosaic Law—actually reveals the opposite: five times Jesus counters tradition with Torah in vv. 8-15. Such a repetitive appeal to the commandments lends credence to the view that, like Matthew and Luke, Mark presents a conservative Jesus who vigorously opposes the infraction and alteration of biblical law. We have also seen that

there are at least two alternative explanations of Mark 7.19b that cohere with this perspective.

Jesus' impassioned protest against commercial activity in sacred space similarly reveals his desire to uphold Scripture by preserving the original purpose of the Temple as a 'house of prayer' (Isa 56.7). Considering the wealth of early Jewish sources that testify to theft and violence committed by high-priestly families of the first century, it is also plausible that Jesus demonstrated against such abuse in favour of the common people. In typical prophetic fashion, Jesus prophesies the impending doom of the Temple in the Olivet Discourse, but always remains engaged in the greatest institution of Judaism and weeps over the very thought that such judgement is imminent.

In none of these disputes does Jesus abrogate, revise, or reject Torah practise concerning Sabbath, food, purity, and Temple. Nor does Jesus show signs of indifference to covenantal living. In all three accounts, his passion for the written Word is most evident in the manner in which he speaks, which can be summarized as follows: 'Have you not read what David did?' (dispute over Sabbath); 'Your tradition contradicts what Moses commanded!' (dispute over purity); 'Your actions disregard what is written in Isaiah!' (dispute over Temple). The notion that these controversies indicate a general disregard for the basic tenets of Judaism seems most unwarranted. While many scholars have rightly recognized undertones of anti-Judaism in previous Synoptic research, it remains difficult to ascertain how the view of a Jesus who radically opposes Jewish identity markers greatly differs from the 'destroyer of Judaism' we meet in Renan's nineteenth-century novel. Nor does it seem justified to speak of Jesus' laxity towards the Torah, as this approach fails to incorporate the fact that the Synoptics present Jesus as a wonderworker like Elijah and Elisha. Within this context, Jesus does not flout purity laws by touching the unclean or the dead, but echoes the miracles of Israel's heroes of old.

The question of how the Torah-devout message coheres with the rest of the NT tradition is, of course, another subject that cannot be adequately addressed here. However, it deserves mention that Luke's account of the church in Acts accords with the overall conclusion of this study. In Acts 21, for example, he records that all Jewish believers in Jesus, numbering in the tens of thousands (μυριάδες), continue to zealously observe Torah (21.20). It is also remarkable that this very same chapter repeats the Apostolic Decree given to Gentiles (21.25; cf. 15.23-29) for clarification purposes. Thus, the issue of whether

Gentiles were to adhere to all Jewish practises was another issue that would later be addressed by a Jerusalem council of apostles and elders. Jewish Christians would eventually find themselves between the Petrine rock of a growing Gentile church and the hard place of a synagogue opposed to such Jewish *minim* ('sects'). Yet, church fathers indicate that they endured for centuries before eventually fading into history.<sup>423</sup> The very source of their stamina was undoubtedly a deep conviction that their master had taught them to fulfil and not abolish the *yod* of Torah.

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<sup>423</sup> R.A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period until its Disappearance in the Fourth Century*, SPB 37 (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 108.

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